Waste Colonialism: Grounding Theory Using Participatory Methods in The North of England

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the concept of Waste Colonialism and develops a broader framework for understanding it through participatory methodology. It focuses on how global waste flows and environmental harms are deeply intertwined with colonial power structures and capitalist systems, arguing that mainstream solutions are shaped by colonial capitalism influencing public common-sense and neutralising alternative approaches. It aims to develop an empirically grounded theory of Waste Colonialism by amplifying local voices and exploring grassroots alternatives that challenge dominant narratives of textile waste production and management. The objectives include critiquing mainstream solutions to textile waste, including the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework, and proposing transformative frameworks rooted in anticolonial solidarity and everyday resistance practices.

To achieve these aims, the research employed experimental participatory methods, engaging communities in Lancaster and Morecambe through a series of "Sharing Yarns" workshops conducted between May and June 2024. These workshops facilitated discussions around personal garment stories, connecting them to broader systems of colonial capitalism and textile waste. Long-term collaborations with community groups such as Sewing Café Lancaster, Ref/Use Lab, *Jwllrs* and The Closing Loops Project enriched the study, enabling iterative co-creation of activist tools including a zine and a game. These outputs were designed to extend the research's impact beyond academia, serving as platforms for collective storytelling, imagination, and planning toward alternative textile waste futures.

The findings reveal that Waste Colonialism operates at the intersection of material waste, wasted lives, and enduring colonial power relations, perpetuating environmental injustices and systemic exploitation. By integrating historical memory and marginalized perspectives, the research critiques what I conceptualise as the "spells" of capitalist realism—such as the notions that "There is No Alternative" or "Consumer Purchasing is Our Only Power"—and highlights practices that resist these ideologies. Through its emphasis on grassroots collective action and community storytelling, this work contributes to redefining how we understand and address the contemporary crises of neo-colonial capitalism and environmental harm.

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Any errors or shortcomings remain my own.

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Author's Declaration

The thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Vignette One: Contamination

The first memory I have of the definition of contamination is from my early years of secondary school back in the 90s in Florencia, Caquetá, located in the Colombian Andes-Amazon piedmont, where I am from. The teacher, perhaps unknowingly influenced by Mary Douglas' definition of 'dirt', told us that contamination is 'just matter out of place'.

They went on give an example for us to understand better: "let's say you are at the beach by the river with your family having a nice 'sancocho de olla[1]'. Sand itself is not contaminant unless it gets into your sancocho plate. Same with your sancocho plate, it will only become contaminant if you leave it on the sand in the beach". I have to admit this definition of contamination made sense to me then[2]. It is a shame I can't recall which subject were the teacher was lecturing on or what they said after, but taking into account it was a technological school where everything in the world could be sorted with good drawings, electric circuits, and fancy machines, I can't help but think that we took the subject no further and kept on with whatever task we were working on.

Many years after that early definition of contamination by my schoolteacher, I was running a workshop in the same town—with children probably the same age I was when the 'matter out of place' definition was taught to me—and I asked what contamination meant to them. One pupil happily raised his hand and with all the conviction of a not quite teen but not a child either, said: "contamination is for example when on a windy day, trees lose their leaves and they get on the ground making everything dirty. So, you have to come with a dustpan and brush to clean everything up".

I cannot remember what I said or how I contained myself from hugging him, but it stayed with me as a memory that made me laugh and worry at the same time. How are people learning, conceiving and talking about this urgent matter, in

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[1] In our hometown, at weekends or any special day we go to one of the beautiful rivers coming down the Andes and make 'Sancocho de olla', which is a big pot of soup, made with 'gallina', cassava, potato, plantain, squash and so on. Cooked on water from the river in firewood while everyone enjoys swimming and playing in the beach.

[2] I just recently found out that in Purity and Danger, Douglas uses a very similar example with shoes, dining table, food and utensils (Douglas, 1966, loc. 908).

an era where humanity is facing mass extinction by unprecedented ecological

crisis?

Preface

I first encountered the concept of Waste Colonialism through The OR Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation based in the US and Ghana, founded by a couple from the US. According to their website, The OR Foundation has been working since 2011 to reveal the environmental, social, and economic implications of the second-hand clothing trade in Kantamanto, Accra—the largest second-hand clothing market in the world (The OR Foundation, 2025). In 2021, The OR Foundation launched the *#StopWasteColonialism* campaign, which according to their webpage aimed to pressure the EU to avoid exacerbating Waste Colonialism. It sought to do this by asking for a fair share of the Extended Producer responsibility (EPR) funds—an environmental policy approach that places the responsibility of the post-consumer stage of a product to the producer—to build infrastructure for recycling and improve collection and management of waste from markets. However, at the same time, The OR Foundation publicly stated that it does not support a ban on second-hand clothing imports. This stance effectively consolidates Kantamanto's position within the peripheral role assigned to it by the global economy—a role defined by dependency, exploitation, and systemic marginalisation.

Trying to understand the contradiction of The OR Foundation between using the concept of Waste Colonialism to critique clothes dumping whilst at the same time supporting the continuation of the dumping, marked the beginning of my journey into this MPhil study. I was drawn to the concept of Waste Colonialism because it resonated deeply with me on multiple levels. It struck a chord with my own observations of systemic failures during a decade of activist work in the UK, as well as my prior experiences in Colombia, Brazil, and Liberia. Waste Colonialism offered a framework for understanding the inequalities embedded in global trade systems, particularly the ways in which wealthier nations continue to externalise the costs of production—including their waste—to poorer regions of the globe. Yet, as compelling as the concept was, I also recognised its limitations: how it had been adopted, co-opted, and constrained within existing neoliberal frameworks, failing to offer transformative alternatives.

This thesis is the outcome of a journey seeking to reclaim the concept of Waste Colonialism from co-option by The OR and more widely to redefine how contemporary crises of neo-colonial capitalism and environmental harm are understood and addressed based on the understandings of people in the North West of England. Grounded in my

activist practices and participatory action research, it aims to develop a more situated and theoretically robust framework, in order to change how communities think about waste.

Chapter One: Waste in UK and Global Economies

Introduction

The overarching aim of this MPhil thesis is to move beyond current framings of textile waste and pollution by developing a richer empirically grounded theory of Waste Colonialism. As noted in the preface of this thesis, with their #StopWasteColonialism campaign The OR Foundation demands that the money collected through Extended Producer Responsibility program should move with the exported clothing waste, for the communities receiving them invest in infrastructure to manage waste in order to achieve a Justice-led transition (see The OR, 2023). I argue, however, that The OR Foundation has co-opted the radical potential of the Waste Colonialism concept by subsuming it within the logics of the Eurocentric Waste Management model. The specific vehicle for this is so-called "Extended Producer Responsibility" (EPR) which is due to be implemented for clothing waste in the UK as part of the delayed environmental Act. 2021, including in Lancaster District, a local government district of Lancashire, located in Northwest England where I have been carrying out activism as community artist, designer, and ethnographic researcher for over a decade.

Drawing on a series of experimental participatory activities undertaken with people from Lancaster and Morecambe in the UK, this MPhil explores how such a theory could effect change on the ground in terms of enriching understanding and developing new responses to the global crises of textile waste and pollution. It builds on and shares findings from four "Sharing Yarns" workshops held in Lancaster and Morecambe from May to June 2024 and follow up interactions and discussions with long term collaborators— community groups and projects—Sewing Cafe Lancaster, Ref/Use Lab, The Closing Loops Project, Critical Crafts and Jwllrs. By drawing on grassroots perspectives, values, narratives and stories of local people in North West England, the thesis reimagines the problem of Waste Colonialism and co-produce alternatives.

Within this context, this thesis aims to conceptualise Waste Colonialism, develop a theoretical framework around it, and conduct a series of experiments in Lancaster and Morecambe to examine how such a theory can influence both the understanding of and responses to Waste Colonialism. In doing so, it seeks to re-narrativize the concept while bridging the sociological project of exposing the horrors of global production models with the illumination of alternative ways of being.

In this first chapter, I will outline the key concepts of colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, Waste Colonialism, waste and wasted lives—those deemed expendable in this profit-driven system. I situate these in the context of a critiques the fashion industry as a system driven perpetuating environmental degradation, labour exploitation, and global inequality. I examine how the industry promotes overconsumption, Waste Colonialism, and the exploitation of marginalized communities in the Global South periphery, as well as the periphery within the Global North Core. I look at how The OR Foundation address Waste Colonialism through campaigns like #StopWasteColonialism, and argue that these efforts fail to challenge deeper structural inequalities rooted in colonial legacies and ongoing colonial dynamics. Instead, they often co-opt the concept by focusing on reformist solutions like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). In order to present these dynamics to participants, I designed a Take-Make-Discard Framework, illustrating the linear lifecycle of clothing—from material extraction to disposal—and exposing the limitations of mainstream sustainability approaches. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for systemic change beyond neoliberal and neo-colonial paradigms and an outline of the thesis.

The Clothing and Fashion Problem

Some of the most prominent critical voices in fashion scholarship state that the fashion sector is arguably the quintessential poster child of consumer capitalism (Fletcher, 2018, p. 6; Fletcher and Tham, 2019; Twigger, 2024). This industry is not only accelerating global mass extinction but also relies on the systemic production of some lives as disposable. Despite repeated calls for systemic change from scholars such as Fletcher, Twigger, and Tham, the neoliberal and neo-colonial economic agenda continues to shape both fashion practices, influencing scholarship and teaching within the field.

Expanding on the common understanding of the concept of fashion, which is often limited to a niche field practiced by an elite, Alice Payne, Professor and Dean of the School of Fashion and Textiles at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), asserts in her 2021 book *Designing Fashion's Future* that "by getting dressed we all participate, whether knowingly or not, in fashion, 'a system of dress comprised of industry, culture and change'"(Payne cited in Aspinall and Twigger Holroyd, 2024, loc. 66). In alignment with this, Sandra Niessen—a founding member of the Research Collective for Decoloniality and Fashion (RCDF)—in a 2020 article called *Fashion, its Sacrifice Zone, and Sustainability*—concludes that the concepts of fashion and non-fashion are symptoms of colonial thought, arguing that "non-fashion is fashion, and fashion is not fashion but a dress system fatefully bound to an exceptional economic system" (Niessen, 2020, p. 872)[3].

These contemporary definitions resonate with a 1937 quote by the fashion journalist Alison Settle "Fashion is an expression of the world we live in, a picture of what is going on inside of our minds as well as outside in historic fact."[4] This prompts me to ask: if fashion, as the clothing people wear, is indeed the expression of the world we live in, what is that world?

Global environmental burdens arising from material extraction, manufacturing, distribution, and disposal show no signs of abating (Rogich, Cassara, Wernick, et al cited in MacBride, 2011; UNEP and IRP, 2024). Global fibre production has more than doubled over the past 20 years (Textile Exchange, 2020), while the number of times the average garment is worn has decreased significantly (Assoune, 2020; Niinimäki et al., 2020, p. 189). Meanwhile, consumption is projected to increase by 63% by 2030 (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2023; McKinsey & Company, 2024; Vasquez Jr, 2023). The imbalance in the global supply and demand for used textiles is worsening. The glut of second-hand clothing flooding the market is depressing prices for used textiles (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019), while collection points for second-hand clothes in the Global North core are closing due to oversupply (Yeung, 2022). At the same time, exporting textile waste to countries in the global South periphery is increasingly being outlawed (Fischer and Balk, 2022; Juanga-Labayen et al., 2022).

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[3] Following these it can be concluded that everyone who wear clothes, intentionally or not, participates in fashion and in the course of this thesis I will uses the words fashion and clothing interchangeably.
[4] Quote by Settle observed by Victoria Frausin at the Exhibition "Fashion on the Ration: 1940s Street Style" in the Imperial War Museum, Manchester October 5th 2016.

The values of the dominant globalised mainstream clothing system are embedded in neoliberalism—as an economic and political ideology that emphasizes free markets, deregulation, privatization, and the reduction of state intervention in the economy. As scholars such as Fletcher and Tham (Fletcher and Tham, 2019), Aspirall and Twigger (Aspinall and Twigger Holroyd, 2024) and Niessen (Niessen, 2020) have argued, this framework drives the production and consumption of ever-increasing volumes of clothing.

The contemporary fashion industry is also heavily dependent on fossil fuel extraction in two primary ways: first, through the burning of oil and gas for energy production to power the entire clothing lifecycle—including petrol, diesel, jet fuel, and natural gas; and second, through the production of petrochemicals used in a wide range of industrial and consumer goods, particularly cheap synthetic fibres. These fibres—including polyester, polyamide (nylon), polypropylene, acrylic, and elastane (also known as spandex or Lycra)—constitute the majority of global fibre production (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021; Textile Exchange, 2024).

This dependence is particularly concerning for three reasons. Firstly, the release of synthetic microfibres—microscopic particles of cheap synthetic fibres—into waterways through laundering and industrial processes has led to their accumulation in the world's oceans at an alarming rate, posing a significant threat to marine ecosystems and entering the food chain (Boucher and Friot, 2017; Cullen, 2024; Gaylarde et al., 2021; Nl et al., 2016). Secondly, as scholars such as Alice Mah (2023) argue, fossil fuel dependency represents a planetary threat, deeply entangled with the climate emergency and carrying profound implications for environmental justice and the perpetuation of colonialism. Every stage of oil extraction and petrochemical production poses significant risks to human health. These environmental justice concerns are particularly acute, as toxic plastic and petrochemical pollution disproportionately affect low-income and minority ethnic communities worldwide.

Thirdly, there is a suggested correlation between the availability of low-cost fossil fuel-derived materials, the rise of fast fashion, and the sharply declining cost of clothing (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021, p. 13), perpetuating a vicious cycle of overproduction and exacerbating public health and environmental justice challenges.

Within this context, clothing production aligns with observations by waste scholars over decades: products are designed to move through, rather than into, households (see Brooks et al., 2017, loc. 95; Liboiron, 2021, loc. 194; MacBride, 2011).

Clothing, which was traditionally acquired from specialist shops or made to order by local makers, is now available for purchase in supermarkets alongside items intended for single use—such as disposable party supplies and cleaning products—or consumables like tinned food and beverages—and disposed of following the same logic, as illustrated in the photo of a random recycling box on collection day in the Lancaster district (see Figure 1) with some supermarkets even offering their own clothing brands (see Table 1).

Figure 1 Recycling box on collection day in Lancaster, Lancashire (Frausin, 2023).

UK Supermarket	Clothing Brand
Tesco	F&F (Florence & Fred)
Sainsbury's	Tu Clothing
Asda	George
Morrisons	Nutmeg
Marks & Spencer (M&S)	Per Una, Autograph and Goodmove
Aldi	Specialbuys
Lidl	Lidl Deluxe and Crivit

Table 1 List of clothing brands by UK supermarkets (Frausin, 2025).

Neoliberal economic and political ideology has had a profound impact on the fashion industry. Its influence can be seen in various aspects of the industry, from

material extraction, production and labour practices to consumption patterns, branding and discard protocols. Neoliberalism has globalized reducing trade barriers and promoting free trade agreements. This has led to the maximization of surplus value outsourcing of manufacturing to countries where the super exploitation of labour (poor working conditions, low wages, and long hours, lack of labour protections) is (or was) possible, e.g., China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and India (Harvey 2007), along with the production of wasted lives: a term which refers to marginalized groups deemed surplus or disposable in capitalist societies (coined by Baumann, 2004).

Neoliberalism is closely associated with the combination of hyper-consumerism and disposable clothing, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "fast fashion" or "ultra-fast fashion," where clothing is produced quickly and cheaply to meet ever-changing trends. Brands such as Primark, H&M, and Shein have thrived under this model, encouraging consumers to purchase more clothes more frequently. However, as some fashion scholars argue, this approach is not exclusive to "fast fashion" brands; its logic is deeply entrenched in university curricula for fashion and textiles (Aspinall and Twigger Holroyd, 2024, loc. 103). It also extends to brands traditionally perceived as being outside the fast fashion label, as evidenced by data from the *Tag Ur It* audit conducted by The OR Foundation. This audit, which recorded brands found on Accra's beaches between June 2023 and May 2024, ranked M&S, Next, and Adidas as the top three contributors, respectively (see Appendix 1: Tags audit by The OR Foundation).

The fashion industry is said to be one of the largest polluters in the world contributing to water pollution, textile waste, and carbon emissions (see for example Bick et al., 2018; British Fashion Council, 2023; Brooks et al., 2017; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017; Niinimäki et al., 2020; WRAP, 2019). This industry, underpinned by neoliberalism has led to the dominance of multinational corporations that exploit cheaper labour, resources and territories in the Global South periphery and the periphery within the Global Core North to maximise profits. It could be said that this dynamic not only mirrors colonial-era extractive practices, where wealth is extracted from peripheral regions (Global South) and concentrated in core regions (Global North), but both: sits on the global connections forged through colonialism, and perpetuates its logic by constantly reproducing itself throughout the global political economy, consolidating a neo-colonial relationship where the Global South periphery remains dependent of the Global North core.

The entanglement of the fashion industry with class relations, labour exploitation, and globalization consolidated with the emergence of what is known as fast or ultra-fast fashion—a business model that relies on cheap labour and materials with speedy production and disposal. Historically the working class produced garments for the consuming middle and upper class. However, from the late twentieth century, with the relocation of textile production from the Global North core to the Global South periphery, the incorporation of just-in-time production methods (borrowed from the automotive industry) and the widespread availability of inexpensive synthetic fibres such as polyester, working-class people in the Global North core also became consumers. This shift has led to a discursive trend in which blame for the environmental and social harms of fast fashion is disproportionately directed at working-class consumers in the Global North.

In sum, the fashion industry perpetuates a system where the Global North core dominates the more profitable stages of the value chain—design, branding, and retail—while the Global South periphery and the periphery within the north—often Black, ethnic minority, working-class populations who suffer disproportionate burdens of living with pollution—is treated as a resource base, a dumping ground, and a site of cheap labour, reinforcing historical patterns of colonial domination. Before moving forward, I need to briefly discuss how I understand Colonialism to then look at its relationship with neoliberalism, neo-colonialism and the globalized mainstream fashion system.

The Current Neo-Colonial/Neoliberal Fashion System

Colonialism and the variety of forms it has taken historically have been widely studied and a variety of theoretical approaches have been developed to understand its causes, effects, and modes of resistance (Chibber, 2013; Cusicanqui, 2012; Loomba, 2015; Young, 2020). For our purposes here—the conceptualization of Waste Colonialism—I am going to build on the work of Professor Gurminder K Bhambra, particularly on the 'varieties of colonialism', since it situates Europe's colonial histories at the core of how the present is understood, which is relevant because Lancaster, UK comprises the empirical focus of the thesis. Bhambra argues that colonialism is not something of the past, but it continues to shape the present in profound ways (Bhambra, 2022). Bhambra distinguishes the European mode of colonization from other modes of domination since "This involves European territorial acquisition, settlement and governance, and a variety of modes of domination and subjugation that are fundamental for shaping the modern world"

(Bhambra, 2024, p. 196). To illustrate that colonialism is present in ongoing global inequalities, and that the legacies are not separable from the current systems of oppression, she identifies three intertwined varieties of colonialism that shape our institutions and our understandings of the world : *a*) 'colonialism by corporation', established through various companies from the sixteenth century onwards.; *b*) state practices of extraction of resources at a distance, including transporting people for forced labour and extracting wealth and resources, including through colonial taxation; and *c*) 'emigrationist colonialism' commonly known as settler colonialism, this variety refers to the systematic movement of populations from Europe to other parts of the world (Bhambra 2024).

The dominant globalised mainstream clothing system relies on a variety of industries, including agriculture—for the production of natural fibres such as cotton; petrochemicals—for energy, synthetic fibres, as well as the production of fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides used in the industrial cultivation of natural fibres; and manufacturing, logistics, and retail. As will be explored later in this thesis, it also encompasses disposal. From the perspective of the varieties of colonialism, these industries and the emergence of global corporations can be traced back to the sixteenth century (colonialism by corporation). Their development was not only facilitated by state-sanctioned resource extraction at a distance and settler colonialism (emigrationist colonialism) but continues to reproduce these structures today.

Taking M&S, Next, and Adidas as examples—the top three brands found on Accra's beaches in the aforementioned audit—these corporations rely on global supply chains and continually adjust their sourcing and disposal strategies based on cost and environmental regulations. The ability of these corporations to carry out the more profitable and less polluting stages of the value chain in the Global North core, while relegating the less profitable and more environmentally harmful processes to the Global South periphery (and the periphery within the Global North core), emerges from the ongoing perpetuation of historical patterns of colonial domination—what Bhambra conceptualises as colonial capitalism.

Bhambra defines colonial capitalism as the mutual constitution of capitalism and colonialism, where global economic systems were built on the exploitation of colonized and racialized peoples and resources. Since the modern world was founded on colonialism, and is therefore always already colonial through and through. She critiques

Eurocentric narratives, urging for a decolonial approach that centres marginalized histories to address historical injustices and ongoing inequalities rooted in (neo)colonial exploitation. Today, neoliberalism and neo-colonialism are also deeply interconnected, the structural adjustment policies in Africa of the 1980s being a good example of how colonialism was carried out by other means after the wave of independence following the Bandung Conference in 1955 through to 1975. The point is that capitalist economic structures were not only established through colonialism but continue to be sustained through ongoing -neo colonial dynamics. Colonialism from this view is not just a historical phenomenon; it continues to shape the contemporary conjuncture. Indeed, the very idea of Waste Colonialism underscores that colonial practices of racialized inequality and exploitation are not relics of the past but remain embedded in the present-day colonial capitalism. This neo-colonial/neo-liberal nature of on the dominant globalized mainstream fashion system produces wasted lives by exploiting both people and the environment that sustain them in pursuit of profits through cheap, disposable clothing. We can parse five dimensions to this system current system, all of which are rooted in the colonial period:

1. **Labour super-exploitation**: low-wage workers in the Global South periphery, often women and children, who endure unsafe working conditions, long hours, and poverty wages in the many stages of the cycle of clothing, from material extraction to disposal (Brooks, 2015; Brooks et al., 2017; Dzah, 2024; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017; Niessen, 2020; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Payne, 2019).

2. **Environmental Degradation:** The industry's reliance on synthetic materials, toxic dyes, and excessive water use pollutes ecosystems during production process (Rovira et al., 2021; Terrell and St Julien, 2022); as well as the disposal of unwanted garments in open landfills in the Global South periphery (Dzah, 2024) or incinerators in the Global North core (Han et al., 2025, p. 143; Roy, 2020), harming communities reliant on clean air, water, and soil.

3. **Health Risks:** Workers and nearby communities face health issues from exposure to hazardous chemicals and microplastics (Bick et al., 2018), while wearers are exposed to harmful substances in clothing (Biver et al., 2021; Mohamoud and Andersen, 2017; Palacios-Mateo et al., 2021).

4. **Cultural Devaluation:** neo-colonial fashion system portrays traditional clothing as archaic or inferior, while at the same time commodifies them, stripping

them of cultural significance and erasing artisanal livelihoods (Gavelli, 2024; Ko and Yim, 2024; Park and Chun, 2023). As well as dismissing as archaic traditional ways to understand and relate with waste.

5. **Waste and Overconsumption:** The push for rapid turnover especially in fast fashion creates massive textile waste, with discarded clothes ending up in landfills, further harming vulnerable communities (Baraka, 2021; Chua, 2023; Sharma, 2023).

This phenomenon also happens in the periphery within the Global North core, as the 2020 phenomena of Leicester's "dark factories" in the UK shows, where:

> under-or non-payment of wages at the National Minimum Wage (NMW), the absence of employment contracts, late payment of wages, and the official declaration of a portion of wages only" had become the norm. Detailing degrading working conditions "that exploit the various vulnerabilities of different groups of workers" (Sullivan, 2022, p. 495).

This social and environmental harm disproportionately affects marginalized populations both in the Global South periphery and the periphery within the Global North core. For me the most important problem of fashion is waste, especially when we expand the concept to include wasted lives (below). In order to better understand this, as I noted in the preface, I turned to the concept of Waste Colonialism, but before looking at it in more detail and I now examine related concepts of waste and wasted lives.

Waste

Waste has been looked at by many scholars across disciplines and research arenas, including a variety of perspectives such as environmental justice, multi-species studies, behaviour and governance, trade and legislation, industrial and economic ecology. They have made contributions to the field of Waste Colonialism and offered analogous terms such as toxic colonialism, waste siege, nuclear colonialism and climate coloniality.

The term toxic colonialism, referred to as well as waste imperialism (Seldman, 2002), emerged at the same time as Waste Colonialism (Dalyell, 1992) and the terms are sometimes used together or interchangeably. Research cover a variety range of topics, such as international toxic waste trade that considers profitable objects for reuse and

recycle (Afterlife), to highly toxic materials to be disposed of, to areas with low, flexible or nonexciting state regulations (see for example Backer, 2021; Clapp, 2001; Kone, 2014; Lassana, 2009; McVeigh, 2022; Pratt, 2011; Rublack, 1989), internal toxic colonialism from green criminology (Fegadel, 2020), extends the entanglements between toxic colonialism, waste trade and money laundering (Uzun, 2021); Drawing on scholarship on island ecologies and postcolonial environmental criticism, Sophie Fuggle in a 2022 article titled "Toxic colonialism: Between sickness and sanctuary on Ilet la Mère, French Guiana" looks at the legacies of the slave plantations of seventieth century French Guiana, that overtime functioned as leper colony, penal settlement, prison farm, and disease laboratory, to a current landscape of exclusion as a nature reserve. For Fuggle, the term 'toxic' is considered in relation to 'disease', 'contagion' and 'toxic heritage' (Fuggle, 2022).

Other analogous term is nuclear or radioactive colonialism that refers to the internal or cross border exploitation of environments and peoples to sustain the nuclear fuel cycle (mining, refining and disposal) for nuclear energy, weapons production and testing, and its corollary wastes, on territories on which colonial legacies dictate power relations.

Several studies have diagnosed the dimension of nuclear or radioactive colonialism from different perspectives, from the how nuclear colonialism is perpetuated through discourse (Caswell, 2022; Edwards, 2011; Endres, 2009; Jones, 2021), identity (Hecht, 2018), governance (Hecht, 2023), looking at resistance and gender (Runyan, 2018). The idea of "toxic terrorism" is used to compare the international shipment of hazardous waste to the slave trade (Kohl and Sud, 1989). While "climate coloniality" focuses particularly on the uneven and inequitable impacts of climate change (Sultana, 2022). Waste siege as "matter with no place to go", was conceptualized by the anthropologist Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins (Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2019) to the case of occupied Palestine, looking through waste to the conditions imposed by the settler colonial rule and extending this as a metaphor for a besieged planet.

A very different approach to toxic colonialism can be found in the article "Toxic Colonialism, Environmental Justice, and Native Resistance in Silko's Almanac of the Dead" by the Professor of English and American Studies, T. V. Reed (Reed, 2009). *Almanac of the Dead* is a 1991 novel that is said to have inspired the Zapatistas revolt in Chiapas, by Leslie Marmon Silko's, a man of mixed Laguna Pueblo, white, and Mexican ancestry, who grew up on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico. Reed interprets

Silko's work from a decolonial environmental justice perspective, as a radical critique of neo-colonial political economy and corporate globalization, that labels subaltern peoples and their lands as "waste" in order to expropriate them—in ways akin to how the import of colonial diseases and guns did in the sixteenth century. Reed's interpretation is valuable for the contextualization of Waste Colonialism and anticolonial interpretations, such as the historical scope, the power of storytelling and ideology, diversity and tension among positions, economic decolonization, and the reduction of aesthetic, spiritual, textual, and environmental economies to commodity. I will bring these aspects back in when discussing anticolonialism further in the thesis, for now, it is important to note the way Reed aligns with critics of mainstream environmentalism and urges a critical view of the environmentalism embedded in a global justice movement, that is currently failing in articulate the links between oppressed humans and exploited environments.

On Waste Colonialism, topics such as e-waste, plastics, and the rhetoric of recycling and sustainability have been widely researched (see for example Dora, 2022; Fuller et al., 2022; Kirby and Lora-Wainwright, 2014; Lepawsky, 2018; Liang and Ping, 2024; McVeigh, 2022; Stoett, 2024). In the clothing industry, dominant approaches to understanding Waste Colonialism tend to focus on material waste at the post-consumer stage (Baruah, 2024; Chua, 2023; Cullen, 2024; Skinner, 2019; Vanacker et al., 2023), often using the definition provided by The OR Foundation as a baseline. This definition frames the dumping of second-hand clothing in the Global South periphery as a consequence of colonialism but limits possibilities for resistance within the neoliberal relationship of capital and labour. In doing so, it dismisses the central role of colonial capitalism in perpetuating ongoing power dynamics, which I interpret as a co-option of the concept. Along with Waste Colonialism, another feature of the current neo-liberal/neo-colonial conjuncture is the production of wasted lives, that now we turn to briefly examine.

Wasted lives

The concept of wasted lives was developed by Bauman (2004) to categorise individuals deemed redundant or disposable by modern society, a phenomenon that has become

increasingly apparent in a globalised world structured by neoliberal capitalism. It refers to economically marginalised groups—such as the unemployed, underemployed, migrants, and refugees—whose existence is perceived as irrelevant or burdensome to the efficient functioning of society. Bauman argues that these lives are systematically devalued and excluded, reflecting a broader moral crisis in which human worth is increasingly tied to productivity and consumption. This logic of disposability is also deeply embedded in environmental degradation and capitalism's reliance on the externalisation of human and ecological costs, as explored by Nixon (2011) and Moore (2015), who frame environmental degradation and the disposability of labour as interlinked crises.

This relationship between human disposability and environmental destruction is further elaborated by feminist, decolonial, and discard studies scholars. Research in these area critiques neo-extractivism as a model that not only depletes ecosystems but also displaces and marginalises rural populations, reinforcing white supremacy and the expendability of Black and Brown bodies, as well as more-than-human entities (see, for example, Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Pellow, 2016). Furthermore, pollution is increasingly understood as a mechanism of colonial dispossession. Max Liboiron's Pollution is Colonialism (2021) and Malcom Ferdinand's Decolonial Ecology (2021) extend this critique by foregrounding the colonial roots of these processes, arguing that modern environmental destruction cannot be separated from histories of enslavement, colonial dispossession, and racial capitalism. Ferdinand, for example, emphasises how colonialism not only produced human disposability but also structured ecological degradation through plantation economies, extractivism, and territorial dispossession. He introduces the concept of the colonial habitation of the world to describe how environmental destruction is inseparable from colonial violence, making certain lands and peoples perpetually disposable. His work reveals how this process is racialised and historically rooted in colonial expansion, demonstrating that the waste-making logics of modernity disproportionately target Black, Indigenous, and other racialised communities. Thus, Decolonial Ecology offers a crucial extension of Wasted Lives, situating Bauman's concerns within a broader historical and racialised framework and ultimately arguing that environmental justice must be inseparable from decolonisation.

Alice Mah's Petrochemical Planet (2023) further develops the logic of disposability by examining the petrochemical industry's role in producing both human and environmental waste. She analyses how this pervasive sector, driven by corporate and state interests, externalises its ecological and health costs onto vulnerable populations,

particularly in the Global South periphery and deindustrialised regions. Her work deepens Bauman's framework by demonstrating that waste is not only a metaphor for social exclusion but also a material consequence of global petrochemical capitalism. Collectively, these works illustrate how the logic of waste—whether human or environmental—is embedded within the structures of colonial capitalism, reinforcing cycles of inequality and ecological destruction. Furthermore, they expose how these dynamics are inseparable from the enduring structures of colonialism, emphasising how the toxic legacy of empire continues to shape global inequalities in pollution, health, and ecological collapse.

The expendability of labour is particularly evident across the full lifecycle of textiles, where workers are systematically deemed as expendable to maintain high production at low costs and maximise profits. This dynamic can be illustrated through three key examples along three interrelates stages of the cycle of clothing: Cancer Alley (on related petrochemicals), Rana Plaza (on production), and Kantamanto Market (on discard). Cancer Alley, Louisiana—a petrochemical corridor with one of the highest concentrations of toxic industries in the Global North core—exemplifies the racial and environmental injustices tied to industrial production. In this region, predominantly Black and low-income residents face disproportionately high cancer risks due to prolonged exposure to petrochemical pollution (Davies, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Mah, 2023; Terrell and St Julien, 2022; Wesley et al., 2012). Although Cancer Alley is rarely associated with fashion, Mah highlights that "petrochemicals are ubiquitous, forming the building blocks of 95 percent of all manufactured goods" (2023, p.19), including those essential in the lifecycle of clothing. These facilities produce a wide range of goods integral to the clothing industry, including synthetic fibres, dyes, flame retardants, laundry products, and packaging, as well as fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides used in industrial cotton production and the energy to fuel the whole chain for example.

More widely recognised in the fashion sector is the case of the 1,134 garment workers killed in the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 in Bangladesh, who were forced to work in a building with large structural cracks to meet deadlines for the Global North core (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Another example of human disposability can be found in Kantamanto Market in Ghana, the largest second-hand clothing market in West Africa (Manieson and Ferrero-Regis, 2023, p.811), where self-employed girls and women—mostly migrants from more deprived areas in Ghana—engage in high-risk labour,

transporting bales of second-hand clothes that exceed their body weight on their heads while earning barely enough to survive (Agarwal et al., 1997; Agyei et al., 2016).

These three examples illustrate how lives systematically rendered as expendable are a defining feature of capitalist modes of (over)production, facilitated by colonial capitalism—the ongoing economic, political, and social inequalities rooted in the colonial era and perpetuated through neoliberal globalisation. Cancer Alley is situated in a former plantation landscape (Davies, 2018; Mah, 2023, p.59); Rana Plaza is located in what was once a thriving textile industry suppressed under British rule (Bhadra, 2014); and Kantamanto lies in a former British colony strategically positioned for global trade (Dzah, 2024). These colonial histories underpin structural inequalities resulting in weak or absent social and environmental regulations. They reproduce a white-dominated society where people of colour are rendered as disposable. This elucidates "the capacity of the (neo)colonial state [and global corporations] to define and spatialise 'who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not'" (Mbembe in Conroy, 2023, p.1130). It also relates to the work of Ali Kadri, Moore, and Yates, who argue that people and environments are rendered disposable in order to secure the highest profits (Kadri, 2023; Moore, 2022; Yates, 2011).

These examples further reveal that the negative impacts of large-scale, export-oriented industrial clothing production and its associated waste are not confined to the disposal phase. Instead, these impacts recur throughout the entire lifecycle of garments (Aspinall and Twigger Holroyd, 2024; Brooks et al., 2017; Fletcher and Tham, 2019; Niessen, 2020; Payne, 2019). This reiterates a key argument in Discard Studies—an interdisciplinary field examining the production, management, and cultural implications of waste—that transnational monopolies, rather than individual consumers, bear primary responsibility (Gille and Lepawsky, 2022; Hird, 2023; Lepawsky, 2017; Liboiron, 2021; Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022; MacBride, 2011).

Waste Colonialism: tracing the emergence of a concept

The term Waste Colonialism was first outlined in the late 80s, in the drafting of the United Nations Environmental Programme Basel Convention when African nations expressed concern about the dumping of hazardous waste by high GDP countries (core) into low

GDP countries (periphery) (Liboiron 2018:21; Manglou, Rocher, and Bahers 2022; The OR Foundation 2023; Fuller et al. 2022). The most common usage of the term among governments and NGOs, is to refer to the cross-border disposal of a variety of hazardous and toxic wastes, focusing what I understand to be, the transboundary movement of waste from the richer populations of the *core* regions to the poorer regions of the periphery, limiting the discussions to technical and legislative solutions. This legitimises ecomodernist discourses and imaginaries where technologies are imagined as a solution that might allow us to keep on expanding production and consumption indefinitely by removing the problem of waste. Recycled polyester, often marketed as a sustainable solution to textile waste, is a prime example of the latter. Efforts to recycle polyester emerged alongside growing environmental awareness in the 1970s and were subsequently adopted by mainstream brands in the 2000s. Marketed as an eco-friendly alternative to virgin polyester, recycled polyester nonetheless continues to contribute to microplastic pollution and requires significant energy usage, causing further ecological harm by perpetuating reliance on synthetic materials, with some studies equating the environmental impacts of recycled polyester with those of virgin polyester (see for example Qian et al., 2021). It fails to address social challenges such as environmental injustice and the production of wasted lives. As with plastic recycling in other industries, this approach has been criticised for failing to address the root cause of the plastics problem: overproduction driven by neoliberal economic agenda. In addition, recycling has failed to environmental goals (MacBride, 2011), and rather seems to enable both: consumers to disavow the negative effects of their continued consumption by believing they can offset it by recycling—taming any critical view of system change—, and colonial capitalism to perpetuate itself.

This myriad of concepts, theories and approaches intend to take us beyond neoliberal political and economic modalities of reformism—where the waste logics can be resisted through changes within the current system—to radical system change and everything in between. Hence, there is a pressing need for a more comprehensive theorisation of Waste Colonialism that considers wasted lives as a fundamental part of racialised large-scale production systems and recognises its socio-environmental damage as legacies and ongoing of the colonial project. This approach points to the necessity of addressing these issues not only at the product level but also through the dismantling of the neo-colonial structures that uphold them.

The Problematic Co-Option of Waste Colonialism

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the concept of Waste Colonialism was popularised in the clothing industry by The OR Foundation, that defines Waste Colonialism as "the exploitation of one group of people by another through the use of waste and pollution in the other group's homeland" (see Appendix 2: What is Waste Colonialism? Instagram post). As noted in the preface, The OR Foundation facilitates the #StopWasteColonialism campaign, which aims to raise awareness about how the dumping of second-hand clothing in Ghana decimates local industries, forces local retailers into debt, and creates a precarious labour economy.

OR's #StopWasteColonialism campaign emerged as a response to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)—an environmental policy framework originating from the European Union that places responsibility for the post-consumer stage of a product on its producer. It operates following three basic principles: producer accountability, polluter pays principle and circular economy goals in order to shift the responsibility for managing a product's end-of-life impacts from governments and consumers back to producers. EPR has been globally promoted as a cornerstone for advancing a circular economy system (see British Fashion Council, 2023; Juanga-Labayen et al., 2022; UNEP and IRP, 2024). In 2023, this legal framework began being adopted and implemented in the UK (see below).

The OR Foundation argues that in 2021, 80% of the tonnage of waste clothing collected under France's EPR program for textiles was exported to the global South periphery. The funds generated through this program primarily support sorting facilities, recyclers, and exporting companies within France and across Europe, with "no financial support offered to the countries and communities across the Global South that actually manage the waste clothing collected through the EPR program" (The OR Foundation , 2023, p. 6). Through their #StopWasteColonialism campaign, The OR Foundation demands that the money collected through EPR schemes be redirected to the communities receiving exported clothing waste, enabling them to invest in infrastructure for managing waste and supporting a justice-led transition.

The OR Foundation opposes a ban on second-hand clothing imports into Ghana (*Why We Don't Support a Secondhand Clothing Ban [English]*, 2023), dismissing attempts by the East African Community trade bloc—Burundi, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda(Muhumuza, 2023)—to impose such bans since 2016. They

also opposed Greenpeace's recent campaign advocating for import restrictions (Quashie-Idun, 2024). The OR Foundation argues that such bans would undermine the existing economy built around second-hand clothing (Kaledzi, 2022), reinforcing the dichotomy between jobs and justice—a hallmark of colonial capitalism's development discourse, which pits employment against ecological systems (Hecht, 2023), in a world where global industries are already forcing their workers and *fenceline communities*—those living adjacent to industrial facilities (Mah, 2023, p. 16)—to choose between livelihoods and health as the three examples of wasted lives previously exposed it. This stance reflects a tension between addressing immediate economic needs and envisioning alternatives beyond the status quo.

The OR Foundation may believe it is acting appropriately in seeking a fair share of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funds. However, neither economic compensation nor opposition to the ban in order to preserve jobs addresses the historical loss of land suffered by the population during the colonisation of Ghana—historically known as the Gold Coast—nor offers an alternative beyond the status quo for the descendants of those who remained and now work in precarious conditions, or those who were captured, enslaved, and transported to the Americas from forts such as Elmina and Cape Coast Castle in Ghana's central region.

Not only does this approach fail to confront the ongoing inequalities rooted in the colonial era, but it also perpetuates them by naturalising the Kantamanto community as the default recipients of second-hand clothing and romanticising their capacity to mend, repair, and upcycle. They state that "Kantamanto leverages this indigenous sustainability logic to transform millions of garments that were discarded by citizens in the Global North into garments of value"(The OR Foundation , 2023).

In defining Waste Colonialism, The OR Foundation draws on the work of Max Liboiron, a Professor of Geography and one of the most influential scholars in the field of Discard Studies. Liboiron's central thesis is that waste and pollution colonialism are characterised by colonial entitlement to land, extending beyond the mere export of material waste (2018–2021). However, the primary demand of The OR Foundation 's #StopWasteColonism campaign—that funds collected through EPR schemes in Europe should follow the waste to the Global South—remains firmly embedded within the logics of Eurocentric waste management. I argue that The OR Foundation 's interpretation of

Waste Colonialism fails to fully consider colonial capitalism as a fundamental structure driving the injustices they seek to address.

EPR is set to be implemented for clothing waste in the UK as part of the delayed Environmental Act 2021, including in the Lancaster District—a local government district in Lancashire, North West. This region has been the focal point of my activist-scholar work for over a decade, where I have collaborated with grassroots initiatives to challenge dominant narratives around waste and consumption. For instance, I have worked with Sewing Café Lancaster, which advocates for an ethical textile industry and regenerative textile practices; Ref/Use Lab, a feminist laboratory focused on equitable social and environmental production policies and practices; and The Closing Loops Project, a Food Futures initiative aimed at fostering a thriving local economy in North Lancashire. These experiences have informed my approach to exploring Waste Colonialism, both theoretically and practically.

My Take-Make-Discard Framework

In order to share the insights I gained from reading the abovementioned literature with my research participants and collaborators, and to influence both the understandings of and the responses to Waste Colonialism in anticipation of the implementation of Extended Produced Responsibility in Lancaster District, I developed the Take-Make-Discard Framework. This was a central element enabling me to "vernacularise" Waste Colonialism. By this I mean that I present participants with a framework which provides them with a shared critical lens, and then use findings to dialectically improve the methods for subsequent workshops. Two key outputs developed in this way were the Zine and the Game (chapter 6).

Kate Parizeau, in "Teaching critical waste studies in higher education" (2021) conceptualises a take-make-dispose cycle that can be applied to the global fashion industry. She says:

> Western societies and cultures have naturalised the 'take-make-dispose' cycle of resource extraction, manufacturing, and consumption that undergirds our economy and many of our social relations (Parizeau, 2021, loc. 3841).

Building on her work, but putting it into conversation with the literature on Waste Colonialism, in this thesis I developed a visual theorization of the **Take-Make-Discard** framework (Figure 2). I frame this as a linear system that starts with material extraction

from the petrochemicals, agriculture, mining and forestry sectors (Take); then manufacture of yarn, fabric and clothes (Make) to be distributed, sold and used to finally be disposed (Discard).
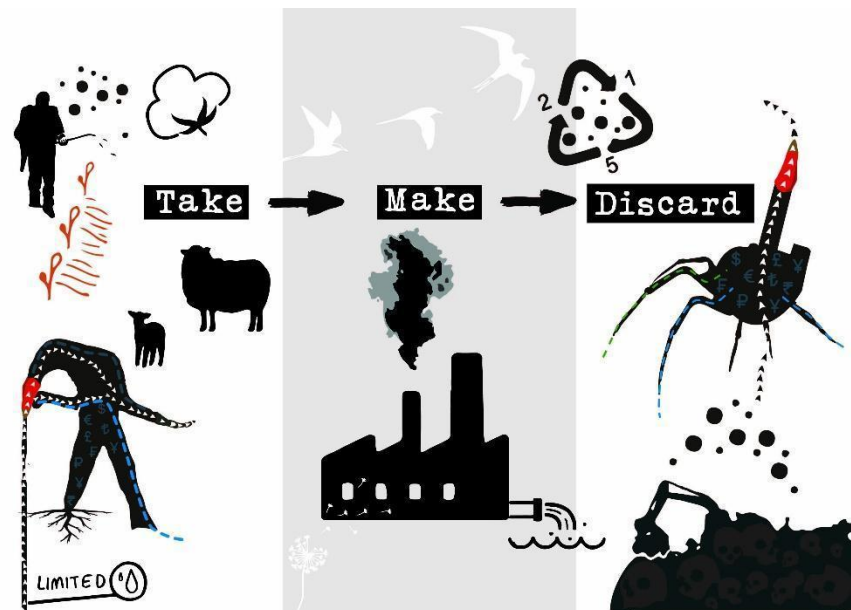
Figure 2 Take-Make-Discard (Frausin, 2024).

The industrialised production of clothes encompasses multiple stages.

Take includes commercial agriculture to grow fibres such as cotton, wool, linen, and bamboo; drilling for oil to produce synthetic fibres and, along with natural gas, to fuel supply chains and provide petrochemicals for agriculture; and mining to extract metals for both traditional and emerging technologies, particularly those essential for projections of renewable energy technologies, battery storage, and electrification.

Make refers to the transformation of materials into clothing through industries such as mills, weaving, dyeing, printing, finishing, cutting, sewing, and trimming, as well as broader factory production systems that support these processes, including the production of packaging, laundering products, and general machinery.

Discard encompasses waste management practices such as collection, classification, and disposal through methods like recycling, landfilling, incineration, or, in some cases, reselling. It could be said that the examples of the wasted lives fit each in these three stages of the cycle: the Cancer Alley and the production of petrochemicals in the TAKE, the garment workers killed in Bangladesh the MAKE; and the self-employed women in Ghana carrying second-hand clothes in their heads as DISCARD.

In this thesis, I use the Take-Make-Discard framework to expose the limitations and shortcomings of mainstream solutions to waste, which I will outline in the chapter 2.

Thesis outline

This chapter has outlined the key concepts of colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, Waste Colonialism, and wasted lives, situating them within critiques of the fashion industry as a driver of environmental degradation and global inequality. It introduced the Take-Make-Discard framework to illustrate the linear lifecycle of clothing and critiques mainstream solutions like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for failing to address deeper structural injustices rooted in colonial legacies and reproduced by ongoing colonial dynamics. The chapter argues for the need for systemic change beyond neoliberal and neo-colonial paradigms.

Chapter two critiques the Eurocentric Waste Management Model, which focuses on recycling and consumer behaviour change while ignoring the broader systemic issues of overproduction and exploitation. It highlights how organizations like The OR Foundation and governments prioritize technocratic fixes, such as EPR, without addressing the root causes of Waste Colonialism. The chapter argues that these approaches co-opt radical concepts and perpetuate colonial capitalism by outsourcing the production of wasted lives and environments to the Global South periphery.

Chapter three explores my dual roles as an activist-scholar and community artist, where I reflect on my decade-long work in Lancaster District and its influence on the research. It discusses how mainstream solutions shape local common-sense thinking and reinforce capitalist realism, while also examining possibilities for developing anti-colonial practices through concepts like unequal exchange. The chapter underscores the importance of bridging activism and academia to provoke political action and social change.

Chapter four details the methodology of the research, focusing on Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the "Sharing Yarns" workshops conducted in Lancaster and Morecambe. It describes how storytelling, visual tools, and collaborative discussions were used to challenge dominant narratives and imagine alternatives to current waste practices. The chapter highlights the iterative process of co-designing workshops with

participants and long-term collaborators, fostering critical awareness of Waste Colonialism.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the workshops, highlighting tensions between public understandings of individual responsibility and actual clothing practices that resist capitalist logics. It identifies three "spells" perpetuated by the Eurocentric waste management model: the belief in no alternatives, the notion of consumer empowerment as the only solution, and short-term technological fantasies. The chapter elucidates how public understanding is shaped by the profit-driven waste management model, which establishes itself as the dominant reality. It concludes by arguing that breaking these spells is essential for fostering sociological imagination and envisioning transformative change.

Chapter six introduces two creative outputs—the zine and the game—developed collaboratively during the workshops to vernacularize Waste Colonialism. The zine serves as an educational resource and platform for collective storytelling, inviting participants to critique mainstream approaches and contribute ideas for systemic change. The game, structured around contextualization, imagination, and planning, facilitates conversations about Waste Colonialism and inspires collective action. Both tools exemplify the generative nature of participatory methodologies.

Chapter seven redefines Waste Colonialism by integrating insights from the literature, workshops, zine, and game to move beyond Eurocentric paradigms. It critiques the co-option of the concept by neoliberal frameworks, such as EPR, and emphasizes the need for anticolonial imaginaries and everyday revolutionary practices. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of bridging theory and practice to address systemic racism, ecocide, and colonial exploitation, offering a vision for transformative change grounded in justice and sustainability.

The thesis concludes by summarizing the key contributions of the research, including the development of a grounded theory of Waste Colonialism and the creation of activist tools like the zine and game. It reflects on the challenges of navigating academia and activism while maintaining a commitment to anticolonial solidarity and everyday resistance. Ultimately, the work seeks to reclaim Waste Colonialism as a radical concept capable of challenging entrenched systems of power and fostering a more just and sustainable future.

Vignette Two: Becoming a Textile Waste Activist

"The TCL Sewing Café, Every Monday 2 to 4:30, So, whatever your interest on textiles Come and share it in our friendly group. We have all the equipment, just bring yourselves and you project. There is no charge!"

No charge, textiles and Café? That sounded like music to my hears. I didn't know that TCL stands for Transition City Lancaster but I went the following Monday and a few months later I was part of their steering group, gave a presentation on the social and environmental impacts of clothes, and was running the Sewing Café Lancaster, all while learning English.

I learned embroidery very early on from my mum and one of my primary school teachers. I self-taught how to use the sewing machine when I was 12 and had other craft/mending skills I wasn't bad at. I had time in my hands and needed a place to learn English, make friends and drink coffee, for free. That summed up to my increasing awareness of the social and environmental impacts of the textile industry and I didn't have to think it twice joining the Sewing Café Lancaster. I was convinced that if people were aware, had the skills and the space to make their clothes last longer, overconsumption—which it was for me at the time the root of the problem—was sorted.

This was 2015, almost a year after I moved to the UK. I was in my process of getting used to charity shops (I couldn't stand the smell) and the idea of wearing second-hand clothes (me? second-hand clothes on my body? Hello…). Despite been aware of the social and environmental impacts of clothes I just love them.

Love fabrics, the textures, the colours. Windows in shops still fascinate me (yes, sometimes they mesmerise me, gosh clothes are beautiful!), even now that I happily wear just second-hand, go around smelling like a charity shop (although they either got better at controlling odours over the time, I like to believe), and understand a bit better the horrors of the supply chain: from the source of materials to disposal.

Chapter Two: Mainstream "Solutions": The Eurocentric Waste Management Model

Introduction

This chapter shows how the clothing industry is deeply implicated in global environmental injustice and the perpetuation of Waste Colonialism. I analyse how multinational corporations in coalition with state power—through the Eurocentric Waste Management model—not only contribute to these injustices but also position themselves as providers of solutions, profiting from the perpetuation of the very issues they claim to address.

In the clothing industry, as well as in other large-scale, globally dependent production systems, mainstream solutions to textile waste are limited to the product level. In the Global North core, these solutions primarily focus on consumer behaviour change. For example, organisations such as Fashion Revolution, WRAP, and various fashion brands and government strategies advocate for buying better or washing at lower temperatures to reduce energy consumption, reflecting neoliberal frameworks of individual responsibility. In the Global South periphery, organisations like The OR Foundation or the World Bank restrict their approaches to engineering and infrastructure, addressing material waste only after it has been produced and overlooking the entire supply chain. This is despite the problem of waste going beyond materiality and its negative impacts being evident throughout the lifecycle of garments, as outlined in chapter 1.

While such campaigns are embedded in public discourse, from 1996 to 2018, clothing prices in Europe dropped by over 30% (EEA cited in Fletcher and Maki, 2022, loc. 204). These low prices incentivise consumers to buy more garments and wear them less (Niinimäki et al., 2020, p. 189), thereby increasing waste both along the supply chain and at the post-consumer stage. In 2018 alone, 796.1 kilotons of clothing were discarded in the UK (Millward-Hopkins et al., 2023, p. 7).

Resource extraction continues to accelerate. Synthetic fibres dominate fast fashion, accounting for 69% of all fibre production (Changing Markets Foundation, 2023, p. 6). This reliance on synthetic materials is closely tied to global oil demand, with BP predicting that 95% of future growth in oil consumption will come from plastic production, including synthetic fibres (Changing Markets Foundation in Fletcher and Maki Fletcher and Maki, 2022).

The latest UNEP Resource Report estimates that, if current trends persist, resource use could increase by 60% by 2060 compared to 2020 levels, with effects at planetary scale (UNEP and IRP, 2024). Despite this, prevailing waste reduction strategies remain narrowly focused on containment, ensuring waste is kept "out of sight." This is facilitated through social campaigns and infrastructure systems rooted in the principle of containment (Fredericks, 2014, p. 534; Liboiron, 2021, loc. 428), which I term as the Eurocentric Waste Management Model.

Eurocentric Waste Management Model

By Eurocentric Waste Management Model (EWM), I refer to the management, handling and disposal of solid, liquid and gaseous discarded materials. This model emerged in some parts of the world along with the urbanisation and industrialization of the nineteenth century and it requires a complex infrastructure managed by private and public operators, that once motivated by profit, fails to challenge overproduction as well as the logics of growth in which it is located (Fredericks, 2014; Hird, 2023; Lepawsky, 2018; MacBride, 2011).

While variations exist across countries, this model predominantly handles large-scale municipal, commercial, and industrial waste through methods such as: industrial-scale recycling, including mechanical, chemical and thermal as well as anaerobic digestion (AD), in-vessel and open-window composting; technical and controlled landfilling, with or without landfill gas-to-energy (LFG) systems; incineration, with or without energy recovery; processing of incinerator bottom ash (IBA); and municipal kerbside collection of residual and recyclable waste (Figure 2).
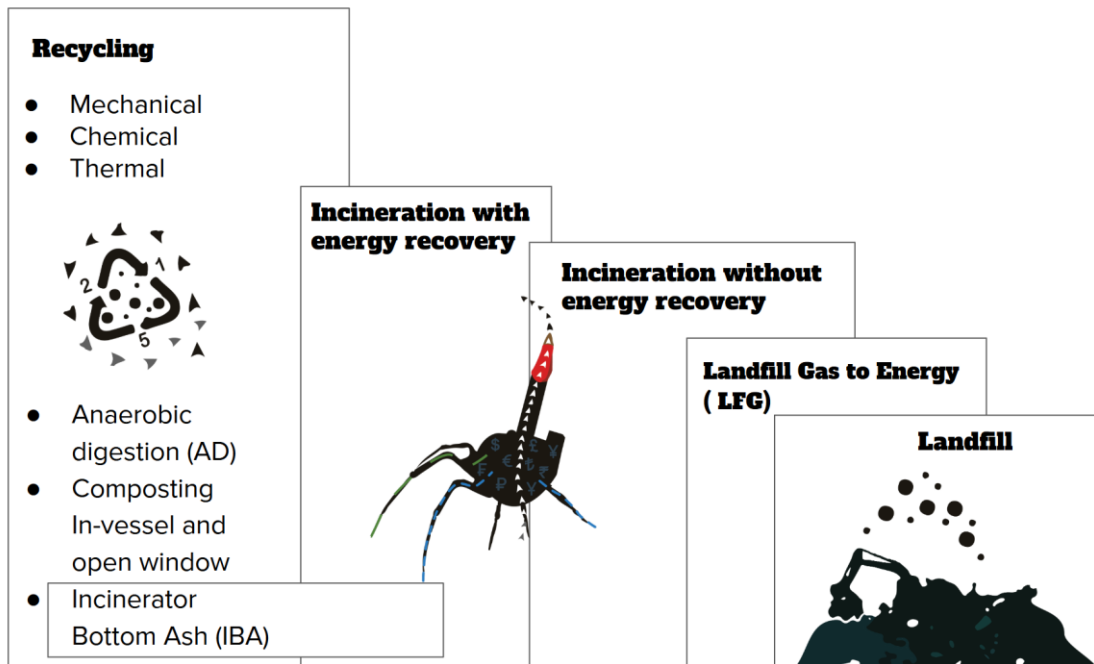
Figure 3 Some of the Methos of the Eurocentric Waste Management Model (Frausin, 2023).

Eurocentric Waste Management as a Form of Scientific and Technological Racism

In the field of environmental justice, issues of equity have been extensively researched in the United States, with two particularly influential reports—U.S. General Accounting Office (USGAO) Report (1983) and United Church of Christ (UCC) Report – "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States" (1987) — alongside the foundational work of Robert D. Bullard, particularly his book *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990). These studies highlighted racial disparities in exposure to hazardous waste, demonstrating that low-income and minority ethnic communities are disproportionately situated near hazardous waste sites and facilities, thereby suffering a range of environmental, health, and socio-economic harms. This systemic disparity exposes Eurocentric Waste Management as a form of scientific and technological racism.

Although research in the United Kingdom is more limited in comparison to the United States, several studies have similarly found that waste management sites are disproportionately located within deprived communities (Friends of the Earth, 2001; Laville, 2020; Richardson et al., 2010; Roy, 2020; Walker et al., 2005). More recently, an article by sociologist Alice Bloch and journalist Katharine Quarmby "Environmental racism, segregation and discrimination: Gypsy and Traveller sites in Great Britain" (2025),

argues that the placement of such sites is not merely a historical legacy of racism. Instead, it demonstrates how new waste facilities continue to be established in polluted and isolated areas, often in proximity to already deprived communities, reinforcing environmental racism as an ongoing feature of the Eurocentric Waste Management model.

These findings align with research showing that the majority of plastics collected for recycling in the UK are exported to countries with inadequate waste management infrastructure, exacerbating environmental injustices on a global scale (Cotta, 2020; Drewniok et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2024). Similarly, as discussed in the previous chapter, The OR Foundation has highlighted that most waste clothing collected under France's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programme for textiles is ultimately exported to the Global South periphery.

These examples illustrate how environmental injustice and environmental racism manifest both within the Global North core and the Global South periphery. If analysed in relation to the historical process of the English enclosures—which laid the foundations for unequal land distribution in Britain—and its connection to British colonial expansion, as recently examined in parallel by sociologist Imogen Tyler (2025), it becomes evident that the concentration of waste-related hazards in marginalised communities, both domestically and globally, is deeply interconnected. Understanding these processes together expands the conceptualisation of Waste Colonialism, shedding light on historical power dynamics as well as the ongoing neo-colonial structures that sustain them following Bhambra's argument that colonialism is not something of the past, but it continues to shape the present in profound ways through ongoing economic dependence of postcolonial nations through trade agreements and financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

Following this colonial perspective, the Eurocentric Waste Management Model embodies an assumption of dominance over nature, relying on chemical and technological fixes. It perpetuates the doctrine of discovery, legitimises territorial appropriation, and constructs a self-image in which scientific and technological knowledge is framed as an exclusively European product (Liboiron, 2021; Seth, 2009).

Waste management practices outside the Take-Make-Discard framework are often dismissed as fragmented, archaic, or inferior. From this perspective, waste "crises" or challenges in the Global South periphery are frequently dismissed as being caused by

corruption, inadequate funding, insufficient technical expertise, or, more generally, an inability to cope with the pace of urbanization (Fredericks, 2014, p. 533). This perspective is reinforced by patronising modernisation narratives that undermine alternative approaches and refuse to critically engage with the ongoing logics of colonialism, including the inequalities between Global North core and Global South periphery omitting any possibilities of a world order different to the one structured on European Colonialism.

I see the Eurocentric Waste Management Model as an exemplar of what Mark Fisher (2009) calls *capitalist realism*—the notion that the colonial capitalist practice of Take-Make-Discard (T-M-D) appears to be the only viable system, rendering it nearly impossible to imagine a coherent alternative. As the sociologist Avery Gordon (2004) puts it: "the belief in the power of global capitalism and its corollary orders to define the very terms not only of what is given, but what could be given as well" (p. 191). In this way, capitalist realism neutralises public controversies through scientific and technological promises, disciplines counter-narratives, shapes locals forms of common-sense and obstructs efforts to reactivate and re-signify historical memory as an anticolonial tool. In the words of anticolonial scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: "the modernising discourse of the elites merely masks processes of archaism and economic, cultural, and political conservatism, which reproduce and renew the colonial condition of the entire society"[5] (2010, p. 62). This denies space for new imaginaries, frameworks, and trajectories where the toxic legacies of colonialism might be abolished.

With regard to textiles, the waste management industries of re-wearing and recycling used clothes have become a billion-dollar global business. According to Greenpeace, this sector is "predicted to increase from 96 billion dollars in 2021 to 218 billion dollars by 2026, with exports from the European Union to African and Asian countries reaching 1.5 million tonnes (3 kg per person) in 2018"(Quashie-Idun, 2024, p. 17).

The impacts of second-hand clothes have been widely studied by scholars such as Andrew Brooks, particularly his 2015 book *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World Of Fast Fashion And Second-Hand Clothes* where he traces the human and environmental impacts of second-hand clothes trade across continents; and organisations like Greenpeace Africa that is currently running a campaign urging the Ghanaian government

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[5] Translated from Spanish by Victoria Frausin

to ban the importation of low-quality second-hand clothing and textile waste from the Global North core (Quashie-Idun, 2024); the Changing Markets Foundation has also conducted extensive research into the second-hand clothing trade and launched a report in 2023 called "Trashion: The Stealth Export of Waste Plastic Clothes to Kenya,"; and The OR Foundation , that as noted before, as a response to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) popularised the concept of Waste Colonialism, referring to the export of used clothes from the Global North core to the Global South periphery, through their global #StopWasteColonialism campaign. I argue that campaign by The OR Foundation aims to mitigate these impacts but limits its demands to the logic of the Eurocentric Waste Management model, without addressing the neo-colonial dynamic that continue to sustain it. In the following section, I will review definitions of waste and mainstream solutions such as extended produced Responsibility within the Lancaster district, where I live and work.

How is Waste Understood in EWM? The Waste Hierarchy

The Waste Hierarchy (WH) (Figure 3) illustrates the widely accepted scope of the term "waste." The Waste Hierarchy outlines the preferred methods for managing and handling waste to minimise environmental impact. It emerged in the late 20th century alongside the rise of mainstream environmentalism and is helpful in elucidating both the ubiquity of the term "waste" and its emancipatory potential.

Figure 4 Waste management hierarchy created by the author, based on a photograph taken at the Waste Recovery Park (WRP) in Farrington, Lancashire in June 2023. A plaque mounted on the wall inside the park reads: "We all have a role to play."

In the diagram above, prevention (encompassing eliminate, reduce, and reuse) is represented in green at the top layers, highlighting it as the most effective approach to

waste management. Conversely, mechanisms for dealing with waste after it is produced (recycle, recover, and dispose) are placed at the bottom, with recycling ranked slightly higher than recovery and disposal. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to the Eurocentric Waste Management model, and as will be further explored in chapter 3, resources are often directed towards these less preferable options (recycling, landfilling and incineration), managed by complex infrastructures whose primary aim is the generation of profit, and refuse to critically engage with the legacies and ongoing logics of colonialism, foundational to global inequalities, and neoliberalism as the ideology that facilitates the dominance of multinational corporations that reproduce colonial-era extractive practices benefiting flow to the Global North core at the expense of the Global South periphery, namely neo-colonialism.

Waste, if understood through the waste hierarchy—prioritising elimination, reduction, and reuse—could facilitate a more comprehensive theorisation of waste and Waste Colonialism, as well as broader responses beyond the narrow scope of the Eurocentric Waste Management model, which shapes the actions of governments and organisations such as Lancaster City Council and The OR Foundation. To articulate the radical potential of the concept of Waste Colonialism and to bring anticolonial demands into mainstream discussions on modes of production and discard, I will next examine the legal definitions of waste in the UK.

UK Definition and The Materiality of Waste

> Sometimes the regulatory bodies responsible for overseeing the rules in each country (known as the 'competent authorities') may disagree on whether something is waste (Environment Agency, 2023a).

As this quote from the UK's Environmental Agency demonstrates, there is no common definition of waste among governments, NGOs, practitioners or scholars. Many argue that, due to the situated nature of waste, a universal definition is simply not possible (Armiero, 2021; Douglas, 1966; Gille and Lepawsky, 2022; Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022; O'Neill, 2019; Reno, 2014). This lack of consensus results in overlapping concepts and divergent responses to waste, influencing policies, cannibalising resources, and shifting blame (Liboiron, 2014).

In the UK, for example, the government defines waste as follows:

Material is waste if the holder has discarded it. The holder is the person or legal entity who has the material at the time it is discarded. This may not be the owner— for example, if someone has leased the material, they become the holder (UK Government, 2022).

The government also provides guidance for "producers or holders of waste" to determine whether a material is waste, a by-product, or meets 'end of waste' status (ibid.).

In *World of Waste: Dilemmas of Industrial Development* (1992), Ken A. Gourlay was among the early critics of common-sense definitions of waste as discarded material, as proposed by legal authorities. According to Gourlay and scholars who followed (see for example Fredericks, 2014; Hird, 2023; Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022; Moore, 2012; O'Neill, 2019; Reno, 2015), technocratic waste management measures do not question power relations and tend to focus on the lower levels of the Waste Hierarchy, rather than promoting preventative measures (Gille and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 21).

In short, these normative definitions focus on waste **diversion** rather than **prevention** (Gourlay, 1992; Lepawsky, 2017; MacBride, 2011; O'Neill, 2019; Reno, 2015) as discussed in relation to the **Eurocentric Waste Management model** and the waste hierarchy above. They focus solely on the materiality of waste, failing to acknowledge the longer histories and ideologies embedded within scientific and technological discourse and confined to policy discussions focused on technical-logistical operations and financial considerations (Fredericks, 2014, p. 533). I contend that Eurocentric Waste Management is a form of scientific and technological racism for three reasons: firstly, solid waste sites are likely to be found in predominantly in Black, ethnic minority, working-class populations (Bullard, 1983; Kramar et al., 2024; Mascarenhas et al., 2021; Roy, 2020).

Secondly, by narrowing its responses to downstream material waste, it dismisses the production of wasted lives along the supply chain illustrated in the examples of Cancer Alley, Raza Plaza, and the Kantamanto market presented in the previous chapter. And third, under the spell of technological solutions it maintains the levels of over production and the perpetuation of Waste Colonialism.

The **Eurocentric Waste Management model**, in addition to requiring complex infrastructures managed by private and public operators, and motivated by profit, relies

on global disposal systems that focus exclusively on the management of material waste once it has been created, ignoring waste produced along the whole cycle of clothing (Armiero, 2021; Hird, 2023, 2021; Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022; Moore, 2022; Yates, 2011) and the perpetuation of wasted lives.

In the used clothes trade, this model is implemented, exported and imposed, with claims that waste "crises" or challenges in the Global South periphery stem from a lack of technical capacity, corruption, financial constraints, or, more broadly, an inability to cope with the pace of urbanization (Fredericks, 2014, p. 533). In this way, blaming the South for waste problems exported from the North whilst occluding the responsibilities of the North, Eurocentric Waste Management model builds on, reproduces, and renews colonial power relations. This can be understood as an example of capitalist realism, as it presents itself as the only viable system, disciplines counter-narratives, and renders it nearly impossible to imagine a coherent alternative, both within the global North core and the global South periphery. To illustrate this, I will build on the Eurocentric waste management framework of Extended Producer Responsibility in Lancaster District, where I live.

Eurocentric Model Example: Waste Streams in Lancaster District

Most municipal waste should actually be considered industrial waste that has been externalized to consumers in the form of packaging and disposable and poor- quality goods that individual households are then held responsible for sorting and recycling with unpaid labour, for waste and recycling companies to then get back from municipalities, paid for through public taxes (Liboiron in Hird, 2023, p. 19).

As Liboiron argues here, citizens (through taxation) have been covering the financial cost of dealing with waste, using resources that would otherwise go to health and education services. In Lancashire, for example, waste management is the third-largest budget area after Children's Services and Social Care. The 2024/25 Net Waste Management Budget for Lancashire County Council is £77.652 million (see page 91 of Appendix 3: Cabinet Meeting Lancashire County Council). This figure was not publicly available, and I only discovered it through a series of emails I sent to city and county councillors, who were surprised to learn that taxpayers were unaware of the cost of waste management.

It could be argued that by not making the cost of waste management public, taxpayers have been intentionally kept in the dark about their subsidisation of industrial waste, thereby reinforcing the notion of capitalist realism—that the Eurocentric Waste Management model is the only viable alternative. While local government budget has been increasingly reduced[6], Lancaster residents are subsidising global corporations in two ways: firstly, to produce low-quality, disposable goods, and secondly, to dispose of them, given that the landfill, recycling and incineration services in Lancashire are operated by private companies.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

As noted in the preface, to shift this responsibility back onto producers, a regulatory mechanism known as *Extended Producer Responsibility* (EPR) has been introduced. This EU environmental policy framework places the responsibility for managing the post-consumer phase of a product on its producer. EPR has been implemented to hold those who "produce waste" (sellers and manufacturers) accountable for the costs of managing the end-of-life phase of their products. It could be said that EPR is one of the strategic shifts toxic industries made from defensive to proactive strategies to neutralize public controversy and appear as it was addressing the environmental issues it carries.

In 2008, France became the first country to adopt Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in textile waste management. According to Jordan Girling, Head of EPR at The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), "during the last 10 years [in France], the level of EPR contributions has risen from €11 million to €25.5 million in 2019. From this recouped money, Refashion—the Producer Responsibility Organisation (PRO) overseeing the EPR programme in France—has provided €5.6 million in funding for research and development in the textiles sector over the past 12 years" (*Textiles Extended Producer Responsibility Webinar*, 2024). However, none of this EPR-generated funding has been invested outside of the EU. Furthermore, research by The OR Foundation

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[6] Local authorities—responsible for storage and disposal of domestic waste—are battling against unprecedented pressures of steep increases in its operating costs, increasing demand for services, and below inflation funding from the Government. They are also facing challenges due the uncertainty of the implementation of the new Environmental Act 2021. Yet, waste management companies profit from taxpayers, who at the same time are subsidizing waste-making companies—hence Waste Colonialism, particularly if looking at the whole supply chain— instead of using those resources in more relevant issues such as health and education.

reveals that 80% of the 244,448 tonnes of textiles collected in 2021 through the EPR programme were exported (The OR Foundation , 2023, p. 6), a practice that lies at the core of the #StopWasteColonialism campaign.

In essence, this represents a continuation of business as usual, with increased fees for producers being reinvested in infrastructure for collecting, sorting, and exporting second-hand clothes—many of which ultimately end up in incinerators in Europe or as waste in the peripheries of the Global South. This phenomenon can be described as Gatopardism, which Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui defines as "the policy of changing everything so that everything remains the same" (Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 101).

It could be argued that the widely recognised concept of greenwashing—defined as a company's investment in misleading consumers about its environmental practices (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Delmas and Burbano, 2011; Wu et al., 2020)—could describe the case of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for textiles in France since it appears to offer a radical challenge to the linear lifecycle of clothing of Take-Make-Discard Framework. However, I find the concept of Gatopardism more fitting than greenwashing. While greenwashing refers specifically to superficial efforts to appear environmentally responsible, Gatopardism is a broader concept that describes systemic changes designed to preserve the status quo. In this context, instead of a company merely pretending to be sustainable, Gatopardism could be seen in the creation of infrastructure for collecting, sorting, and recycling clothing, without fundamentally challenging the overproduction and wastefulness of the fashion industry, driven by neo-colonialism.

The OR Foundation advocates for a circular economy, a key feature of the Eurocentric waste management model and one of the three fundamental principles of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). However, the circular economy has been widely criticised from various perspectives for prioritising economic growth, overemphasising recycling, and focusing on technical and material innovation while failing to address social inequalities and risking greenwashing (Alava et al., 2025; Brooks et al., 2017; Kirchherr et al., 2017, loc. 287).

In a recent article Alice Mah (2022), argues that the circular economy is a technocratic project designed to future-proof capitalism. Using the example of plastics, she contends that the circular economy serves as a corporate strategy to protect and expand markets while securing public legitimacy, all the while "masking the implications for environmental justice" (Mah 2022, p.). Within the framework of the Eurocentric Waste

Management model, the circular economy can be understood as an example of *gatopardism*—a technological fix that maintains the Take-Make-Discard model of industrial growth without fundamentally challenging the principle of growth itself. It assimilates and domesticates radical concepts such as Waste Colonialism, adapting them to a profit-making agenda and obstructing existential inquiries into the social, economic, and industrial transformations that could lead to organised political action (see Chapter Three).

By promoting the circular economy, The OR Foundation reinforces the discourse surrounding the dependency of communities in the Global South periphery on waste imports, thereby perpetuating the dichotomy between jobs and justice. Despite these critiques, the circular economy remains a dominant framework in justice-led discourses, including in Lancaster District and in the measures implemented by the council following the Environmental Act 2021. These developments can be understood through the lens of Gatopardism, where structural changes are introduced while ultimately maintaining the status quo.

In the UK, EPR is already in place for packaging, electrical and electronic equipment (EEE), batteries, and end-of-life vehicles (ELVs)(Department for Business and Trade et al., 2024; Environment Agency, 2023b; GOV.UK, 2025). Through the Environmental Act 2021, EPR is being extended to other waste streams, including textiles (Russell, 2023). And, according to the latest report by the UN environmental program "the evidence suggests that while price instruments such as levies and EPR schemes can be helpful, they do more to raise revenues than to reduce demand"(UNEP, 2024, p. 59).

Lancaster as well as the whole UK is subject to the Environmental Act. 2021, a legislation in the United Kingdom designed to address a range of environmental issues and improve environmental governance. It officially becoming law in 2021 and some of its provisions, including the Extended Producer Responsibility, have been gradually implemented thereafter.

Lancaster District and EPR

Through the lens of clothing waste, following a circular economy, the second-hand market claims to get wasted clothing to the 'right markets' (See Appendix 4: SOEX 2019 proposal to Lancaster City Council) exemplifying how corporations capture discourses. This is imagined as those in the global South periphery enjoying the clothes that people

from the global North core no longer want. Clothes are collected through a variety of schemes such as charity shops, donation centres/stations, free doorstep collections, in-store recycling programs, household waste recycling centres/skip, council collection amongst others. With the aim of being recycled, resold locally or distributed amongst the needed at accessible prices. In this way, it could be said that through EWMM, corporations play a role in the global environmental governance and it shapes the public understanding and establishes itself as the dominant reality.

The UK is one of the top exporters of second-hand clothes, and Ghana is said to be amongst the top receivers (Quashie-Idun, 2024, p. 18). In Lancaster district for example, the city council works with a company called SOEX UK, that in their 2019 proposal, they claim to be "the largest clothing re-wear and recycle company in the world... dedicated to sort, grade and redistribute" receiving 400 tonnes per day from the UK and other European countries. They collect used clothes in Lancaster and send them to their plant in Wolfen, Germany.

In their proposal to Lancaster city council, they claim that "SOEX delivers high-grade used textiles to over 90 international markets" followed by a graph where they state that 48% of the exported clothes go to African people (See Figure 5: Worldwide operation graph by SOEX), naturalising the global inequalities that label some regions of the world as importers of second-hand clothing, without questioning the reasons of those inequalities. To understand the inequalities that locate some regions of the world in a residual status, I use the concept of **unequal exchange**.
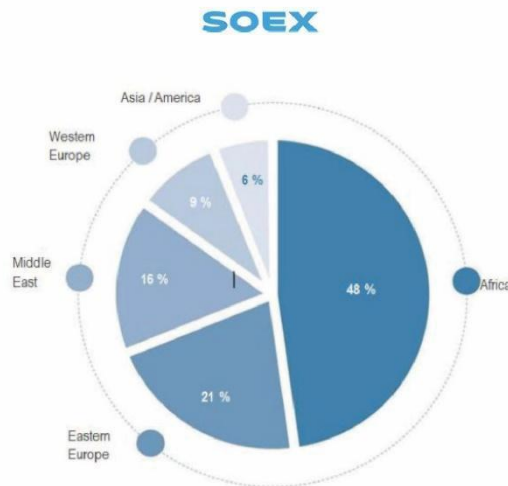
Figure 5 SOEX worldwide operation graph. Source: SOEX (2019), Proposal to Lancaster City Council, p. 8.

Unequal Exchange: Global Inequalities and The Clothing Industry

About ninety percent of UK clothing is imported (Millward-Hopkins et al., 2023, p. 1) externalising the social and environmental costs of extraction and manufacturing to the global South periphery. This process is driven by neoliberal principles, which, according to the Marxist thinker David Harvey, are "increasingly impelled through mechanisms of uneven geographical developments" (Harvey, 2007, p. 87). This links with the ideas of unequal consumption, unequal trade and ecologically unequal exchange that highlights the uneven global patterns of consumption, trade and environmental harms.

Scholars from various disciplines have analysed this externalisation of costs from different angles. Among these, the theory of unequal exchange provides a framework for understanding both the historical constitution and the ongoing effects of colonialism on the global economy. This theory builds on the work of classical political economists and was formalised as a concept by the Marxian economist Arghiri Emmanuel in his book *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade* (Emmanuel, 1972)*.*

Two of Emmanuel's main arguments are particularly relevant to this thesis. First, he argues that labour in the Global South is kept artificially cheap, enabling countries in the global North core to extract value through trade. This allows countries like the UK to import clothing cheaper than a cup of coffee, produced by people who are deemed unworthy and expendable—such as the garment workers killed in the Rana Plaza collapse—while exporting unwanted waste, such as discarded garments, to places like

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Ghana. Second, Emmanuel contends that this unequal exchange is not an unfortunate accident but a structural feature of capitalism.

More recently, in their article 'Plunder in the Post-Colonial Era: Quantifying Drain from the Global South Through Unequal Exchange, 1960–2018', Hickel et al. argue that since 1960, wealthier countries have appropriated enough resources from poorer regions to end extreme poverty 15 times over (Hickel et al., 2021, p. 1030). They further assert that these inequalities are rooted in colonialism, challenging the dominant assumption in international development that the economic performance of nations is primarily determined by their internal, domestic conditions. As they write:

It is impossible to understand the industrialisation of high-income countries without reference to the patterns of extraction that underpinned it... The general logic of colonisation was to integrate the Global South into the Europe-centred world economy on unequal terms (Hickel et al., 2021, p. 1031).

This unequal exchange perpetuates waste and the crisis of capital, illustrating capital mobility through exchange rates, interest rates, and the power of the US dollar. It also reveals schemes such as the Eurocentric Waste Management model, which along with the wider concept of circular economy, perpetuate colonial capitalism since it validates market-led technological fixers, focus on waste rather than production, neutralize counter-hegemonic narratives, and avoid to address the question of how capitalist modes of production drives colonial expansion and domination. It conceals the dumping of waste and attendant social and environmental impacts behind the idea of southern incompetence, whilst holding the EWM up as Northern solution based on the technology, science, and common sense of the superior culture, thus naturalising the export of used clothing from UK and Europe to Africa, as the case of the agreement between Lancaster City Council and SOEX above showcased it.

Ultimately, unequal exchange represents a loss for the global South periphery. However, as Hickel et al. (2021, p. 1044) note, "it is not a loss relative to exclusion from the world economy; rather, it is a loss relative to an alternative world of fair trade." This perspective offers a compelling analysis that broadens the conceptualisation and approaches to Waste Colonialism. It reveals colonialism as both a historical and ongoing feature of the global trade market and challenges capitalist realism by highlighting the possibility of a world where (actual rather than performative) fair trade abolishes the toxic legacies of colonialism.

Conclusion

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is set to be implemented for clothing waste in the UK as part of the delayed Environment Act 2021. The EPR scheme, a component of the Eurocentric waste management model, operates through a complex network of public and private entities, a form of Waste Colonialism where the imagined superiority of western solutions to waste management is used to hide the dumping of waste from the Northern core to the southern periphery. This framework dismisses exploited labour and wasted lives as mere outcomes of isolated technological inefficiencies requiring improvement, rather than recognising them as inherent characteristics of design and production processes shaped by the neoliberal economic agenda. EPR hides the toxic features along the networks of extraction, production, distribution and discard.

As noted, an EPR scheme for clothing has been in place in France since 2008, with funds collected being invested in improved collection, sorting, and distribution systems within France and other parts of Europe. However, research indicates that the majority of these collected items are exported—a dynamic The OR Foundation narrowly defines as Waste Colonialism. Through a #StopWasteColonialism campaign, The OR advocates for a fair redistribution of these funds, particularly to communities such as those in Ghana with which they work.

By limiting their demands to inclusion within the existing planetary networks of oppression dictated by colonial capitalism, The OR Foundation, firstly, naturalises the asymmetric relationships of unequal exchange rooted in colonialism. Secondly, it obscures people's cultural rights to their territory, prior colonialism. Thirdly, this approach co-opts the radical potential of the concept of Waste Colonialism, perpetuating systemic racism, ecocide and colonial logics.

To address environmental injustice and the production of wasted lives, responses to Waste Colonialism should move from reactionary responses such as the request of money from the Global North core to invest in infrastructure for managing waste, to radical demands addressing planetary networks of oppression such as the predatory debt mechanisms exacerbating unequal exchange, and the gatopardism in the superficial approaches of Eurocentric waste management model, with demands such as debt cancellation for countries in the Global South periphery, reparations for slavery and colonial extraction and structural transformation of global economic institutions.

Reclaiming Waste Colonialism?

To sum up, there are three reasons to reclaim **Waste Colonialism**.

Firstly, due to its increasing currency and co-option within the textile industry, alongside other reactive measures and neoliberal green "solutions" dictated by market relations and the profit-driven interests of transnational monopolies. In short, the term is being mainstreamed and co-opted, and this thesis seeks to engage in the struggle over its meaning.

Secondly, Waste Colonialism holds emancipatory potential in its more radical definition. For instance, it has the capacity to trouble the widely accepted Extended Producer Responsibility model and European notions of the circular economy. As a concept that acknowledges the persistence of colonial histories and power relations as they are reconfigured in the capitalist present, Waste Colonialism creates space for anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, feminist, and anti-racist perspectives. It invites counter-narratives and the anti-colonial utopias necessary to envision alternative futures.

Thirdly, the ubiquity of the terms "waste" and "colonialism" further underscores the need for critical engagement. Both are widespread and universally encountered, yet remain contested and resistant to fixed definitions.

Building on my decade-long activist practice as a community artist and designer in the Lancaster District, in the next chapter, I will explore how mainstream solutions shape local forms of common-sense thinking and reinforce capitalist realism. I will then investigate local possibilities for developing practices of Waste Colonialism, aided by concepts such as unequal exchange, to reframe campaigns against Waste Colonialism as anti-colonial forms of praxis.

Vignette Three: Questioning

The man had two set of tables in front of each other. "Each of them", he explained to the audience, "have handmade products: the ones on my left are made in different countries—mainly in Asia—and the ones on my right are their counterpart made in Colombia" I was one of the craftspeople in the audience, looking at the two set of tables mirroring each other. Woodworks, ceramics, weaving, jewellery, basketry and so on were all described and compared with their other, one by one making emphasis on the retail prices. Made in Colombia: COP$530.000, Made in Asia: COP$50.000. Same technique, materials and almost same colours. "Do you see why you can't compete? your products are way too expensive!" he said while breaking my heart. And it has taken me almost two decades of blame, frustration and hope to grasp what was going on.

This episode was in 2006 in Bogota, Colombia at Expoartesanias, a yearly renowned arts and craft fair showcasing contemporary art and traditional Colombian works. It was the fifth time I participated with "Tejido Caqueteno", what I thought it was going to be my lifetime project: working with vulnerable women making handknitted and/or crocheted clothes. We learned from each other. I designed, they worked at home at their peace while still being able to perform their duties. I paid them by piece what I calculated was just and went to Expoartesanias once per year to sell, dreaming about upscaling and the future despite struggling economically to keep it on float. And then this man presented the phantom-like mirrored products and I got in shock. "I can't pay less to my team" I argued to myself, "it wouldn't be ethical and the materials aren't going to get any cheaper, are they?". The first phrase of my process started: The questioning

Chapter Three: My Positionality as An Activist-Scholar

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined Eurocentric Waste Management as a form of scientific and technological racism embedded within mainstream solutions framed by the model, which reproduces global inequalities by using a western model of waste management and its related science and technology to conceal the dumping of waste in the South and label people and environments as disposable, and attendant social and environmental problems, which is caused by the failure to tackle overconsumption in the North (the only way to tackle it would de degrowth, which remains outside of mainstream politics).

In this chapter, I will explore how local forms of common-sense thinking are shaped by these mainstream solutions and I will look at how to develop a theory of Waste Colonialism, using the case of Lancaster District, where I live and work, and unequal exchange explained in the previous chapter. My analysis is informed by my dual roles as an MPhil researcher, as a coordinator of The Sewing Café Lancaster and as an independent researcher for the Closing Loops project and the Ref/Use Lab.

Once I started to learn about Participatory Action Research (PAR), "a principled stance favouring popular participation in research projects" (Rappaport, 2020, loc. 3968) I realised I had long been utilizing this method in my activist work without naming it as such. And in this chapter, I will reflect on my background as an activist and designer in Colombia, to examine my initial motivations for conducting this research project. I then explore some of the productive tensions between scholarship and activism, and how these have shaped my research approach and methods.

"Sociological imagination", as conceptualised by sociologist C. Wright Mills in 1959, as the ability to see the connections between (micro-level) personal experiences, in this case practices of acquiring, buying, caring for, and discarding clothes, and large social structures (macro-level), such as the global economy—corporations profiting from the production of wated lives and environments along the entire supply chain—and the historical legacies that enable it, namely colonial capitalism. One of the aims of my research has been to develop creative and participatory methods that will stimulate sociological imagination within the communities and groups that I work with – that is enable people to make connections between the personal, the socio-economic and

longer histories of conquest, domination and exploitation. An example of these methods is the Take-Make-Discard graphic, which I designed to use with groups to enable new conversations about these connections.

The purpose of this research is to provoke political action to change how we think about and practice 'waste'. Political action can be conceived in multiple ways. For example, it may involve decisions taken by political actors, parties and governments, as for example, when Lancaster City Council declared Climate emergency in 2019 (see below); but it also means political in a broader social change sense, for example the grassroots movements in Lancaster that organised and pressured the local government to declare a climate emergency in the first place. In order to change how waste is produced and disposed of at a local level, I set out to stimulate the sociological imagination of grassroots groups and movements, to enable them think more 'imaginatively' about the problem of waste, and in doing generate anti-colonial anti-waste movement.

My Positionality as Activist-Researcher

My activist practice, as a community artist and designer can be traced back to 2001 in Caquetá, Colombia (where I am from); an area highly affected by decades of civil war. I worked with women (made vulnerable due to being displaced by civil war) making hand knitted and crocheted clothes. These two techniques are labour intensive craft practices and employing them highlighted the skill and labour in garment production, in contrast to mass produced imported products then flooding local markets. I developed a project called *Tejido Caqueteño,* where we learned from each other during group making sessions, then I designed products that participants could make from home at their own pace. I paid participants by the piece at a rate that we calculated was fair, and then I sold the products in specialized fairs. After five years of running *Tejido Caqueteño*, I faced the dilemma or either closing down the project or reducing the piece rates of the women working on it, as I was unable to compete with the low price of imported goods. I felt lowering the piece rate was exploitative, so I preferred to disband the operation. It was only later that I discovered the wider reasons as to why I was finding it difficult to compete in the marketplace, and the link between these reasons and both historical legacies of European colonialism which had situated Colombia as a source of resources on the periphery of the world system, and had enabled capital to relocate to where labour was

currently cheap, south-east Asia, and produce commodities whose price we could never compete with. I watched helplessly as some of the women I worked with, already displaced by civil war exacerbated by US neo-colonial involvement, now the kind of small-scale enterprises – such as mine – that could offer them employment could no longer compete with the neo-colonial corporate power structures of global capitalism, namely, the characteristics of the export-oriented, large-scale production, that shape the global market offering precarious jobs and creating wasted lives. The very issues that *Tejido Caqueteño* had sought to challenge, even though back then I had a much more limited understanding than I do now after conducting this research.

More recently, since 2015 I have been carrying out activism as a community artist, designer, and ethnographic researcher in the Lancaster District in the UK. I have worked as: 1) a textile activist and independent researcher for Sewing Cafe Lancaster—a grassroots project that advocates for an ethical textile industry and regenerative textile practices; 2) the Ref/Use Lab— a feminist Lab for more just social and environmental production policies and practices; and 3) The Closing Loops project—a Food Futures project that aims to stimulate a thriving local economy in North Lancashire (see table 2)

DATE	PROJECT	ROLE	DESCRIPTION	PLACE
2001-2006	Tejido Caqueteño	Owner and designer.	Activist oriented business. Social enterprise working with women making labour intensive clothes highlighting the skill and labour behind garments.	Florencia, Caquetá Colombia
2015-Ongoing	Sewing Cafe Lancaster	Researcher and co-coordinator.	An independent, unaffiliated grassroots project that advocates for an ethical textile industry and	Lancaster, Lancashire, UK

			regenerative textile practices.	
2022-Ongoing	The Ref/Use Lab	Researcher and artist in residence.	A feminist Lab for more just social and environmental production policies and practices, that works in partnership with Food Futures—North Lancashire's Sustainable Food Network—and Sewing Cafe Lancaster.	Lancaster, Lancashire, UK
2022-Ongoing	The Closing Loops project	Researcher.	A collaborative project created to stimulate a thriving local economy in North Lancashire. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.	Lancaster, Lancashire, UK
2023-Ongoing	MPhil Research	Student researcher.	Waste Colonialism	Lancaster, Lancashire, UK

Table 2 Timeline of my independent research and research as MPHIL student.

Pivotal Points

There were three pivotal experiences that led up to my decision to undertake this MPhil project: first, an imaginary world I created as part of a workshop and became the utopian vision of an alternative future; secondly, a pledge I committed to at a conference, and third participatory methods I carried out during preliminary research that I undertook on waste streams in the local area.

In March 2021 I attended a Fashion Fictions workshop, a project led by professor of fashion Amy Twigger Holroyd that "aims to reshape academic, professional and public understandings of the possibilities for sustainable fashion"" (Aspinall and Twigger Holroyd, 2024, loc. 54). In this workshop, inspired by the declaration of climate emergency that Lancaster City Council signed in January 2019, I wrote[7] (Twigger Holroyd, 2021):

In January 2019 in World 59, a city council declared a climate emergency and a coalition of citizens, institutions and businesses understood the impacts of textile waste on people and the environment, especially in poor countries.

A research project to understand the local waste and recycling dynamics resulted in a big positive campaign and people feel more connected with their clothes. We all become users rather than hectic buyers and feel empowered to mend, proudly showcasing the aesthetics of the used. Laundries promoted a milkman-like delivery service to care for the clothes, and a very well used swap system emerged.

Fashion Fictions aims to encourage to switch the focus from 'how things are' to 'how things could be' (Aspinall and Twigger Holroyd, 2024, loc. 128) which I now think through the work of Avery Gordon, particularly her 2004 book *Keeping Good Time,* where she states "We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there" (Gordon, 2004, p. 165). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes this as a *principio esperanza* (principle of hope) that "envisions decolonisation and enacts it simultaneously." (Cusicanqui, 2012, loc. 370) in order to break the spell of capitalist realism.

This fictional exercise helped me to visualize what I was aiming for, frame it and locate it into the optimistic political environment of Lancaster at that time.

2.   *Working Towards Making the Utopian Present*

Having a clear vision of what I wanted to achieve as a community activist, I made a pledge in November 2021 at a regional conference organized by Food Futures—a North Lancashire Sustainable Food Network—where I pledged to 'try harder to learn more about

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[7] https://fashionfictions.org/2021/03/13/world-59/

the local waste dynamics, especially in textiles, and share the results and their relationships with food both locally and globally (if any)'. At this conference, I met people who I later contacted, asking for advice and clarity on how to achieve this.

3. *Devising Methods to Move Towards That Present*

Also relevant to this MPhil is some of the preliminary research I undertook on the waste disposal crisis in the local area in 2021 and 2022, where I used non-standard interviews by hand-drawing live the information collected from participants (see Figure 6) and later translating this into computer graphics. This community research project and the hand-drawing was used to design of the *Buy Less, Care More* interactive banner. This later became an illustration that I used as tool to nurture the sociological imagination of the participants at the Sharing Yarns workshops and interviews during my MPhil (see chapter 4). This experimentation with research methods would become pivotal to the methods I would device and employ during the MPhil research. I understand these methods as an attempt to build collective memory as decolonizing praxis.
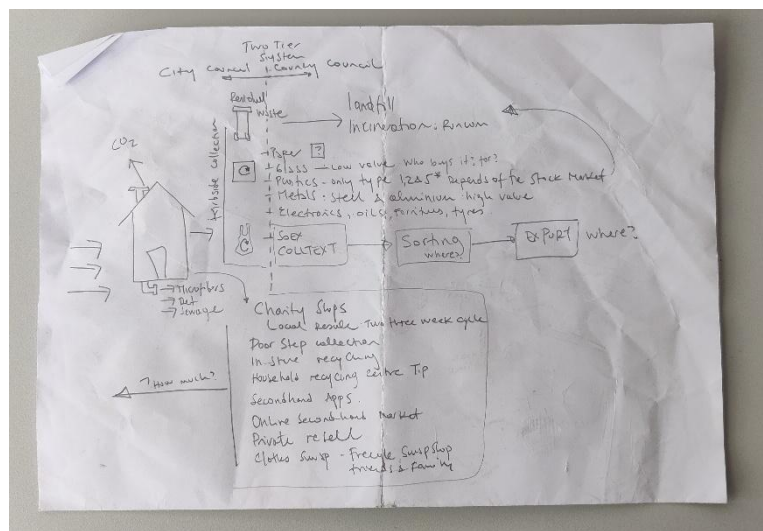
Figure 6 A drawing produced during a non-standard interview (Frausin, 2023).

These are the three pivotal movements that led to the MPhil which I began in Jan 2023, and the Sharing Yarns game (developed later), to which I will come back in chapter 4.

The Making

Pen and Paper

After I took the pledge (see 2 above) and for six months, armed with a pen and blank piece of paper, I conducted open interviews with research participants. I started with the person that at the time was the cabinet member for environmental services in Lancaster and Morecambe, who helped me to understand basic things, that as a foreigner I didn't know, such that the government department responsible for policies and regulations around waste management was the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

I also learned about the lack of autonomy of local authorities on local issues, and their dependency on national government bodies. This revealed how local authorities have to abide by national rules and policies that are dictated by market dynamics completely disconnected from local economies or realities. This made me reflect on how the Eurocentric Waste Management Model also has negative impacts on populations within the global North core.

I also interviewed people from Food Futures, three lecturers at Lancaster University, two from the environment centre (LEC) and one from management school. I also contacted the directors of a plastic recycling company and one of the directors at a funding organization. This process resulted in the creation of The Ref/Use Lab: Reshaping Environmental Futures/Unpicking Systemic Entanglements (former Textile Dynamics), a research group that sits between the Sewing Cafe Lancaster and Food Futures.

I drew the regional waste system the interviewees described "live", and combined it with the information gathered in previous interviews. All the while understanding and discussing it with participants, filling the gaps with every new interview contributing new information and ideas, that in turn provoked new questions. I placed my findings in a reciprocal relationship with the interviewee's knowledge, complementing both theirs and mine. On reflection, I understand this as the early stages of my experimentation with Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods, I was transforming interviews into a participatory experience by constantly asking for feedback (during the interviews and follow up emails) without knowing that what I was doing was PAR.

On top of the creation of the Ref/Use Lab, this stage produced three outcomes: first was the realization that it's impossible to address textile dynamics without

understanding it as part of a dominant system that profits from the production of wasted lives and environments rendering them as disposable.

The second outcome was presentation of the results in March 2022 as part of the event "What is Sewing Café Lancaster (SCL) all about?" locating for the first time the work of SCL in the context of the big picture of production, use and discard. There were over fifty people in the audience, including everyone interviewed, and people that in one way or another have been part of Sewing Café Lancaster as a local social movement. This presentation was the inspiration for the theme of Lancaster's Fashion Revolution Week 2022 (Figure 7).

Figure 7 Activity at FRW 2022. Photograph by Kiki Calliham (2022).

The third was the design, with feedback from people involved in SCL, of the *Buy Less, Care More* interactive banner, that was first exhibited at Lancaster priory in June 2022 (Figure 8). The banner was displayed as part of the festival of Earth, a series of events organized by the priory to celebrate the installation of the scaled sculpture of the earth, a detailed NASA imagery of the earth's surface by the artist Luke Jerram. Here the methodology and the making intertwined. This is the foundational moment where the methods I was using—the transforming of hand-drawing live interviews into participatory experience—were translated into the making that I later expanded into the MPhil research.

In this banner I used images as a way to revealing the untenability of overproduction and unequal exchange. It acted as a vehicle for further conversations and reflections.

Figure 8 Left: Sculpture of the Earth by the artist Luke Jerram in Lancaster. Right: Front of the banner at the priory (Frausin, 2022).

The Stitching

The banner was made by volunteers at SCL, (twenty women, from refugees to middle class residents of Lancaster) and coordinated by Carol Gittings and me during different sessions in public spaces (Figure 9). Despite the theme of the banner, and the conversations I had with members of SLC during the design process; while sewing as a collective, our conversations didn't transcend the usual topics. The themes were limited to narratives of individual blame—people buying fast fashion, not mending or recycling; self-morality—"*I only buy from ethical brands*"; the political environment (bitching about the Tories), or more mundane subjects such as the weather or family issues.

Figure 9 Banner-making process at different venues (Frausin, 2022).

The Joy vs Sorrow deadlock

A tension starts to emerge between my aim to do something overtly politically challenging and what Sewing Cafe Lancaster means to the group as a grassroots practice: I wanted to do lay out the problems to spark action, they wanted the optimism and hope in the face of the crises. The SCL volunteers resisted the idea of critical conversations about Eurocentric Waste Management model and the like, redirecting conversations to a "more positive focus". In a roundtable discussion they expressed how in order to be motivated they needed to believe that they actions had positive impacts.

On occasions I questioned solutions of the Eurocentric Waste Management model such as recycling, and how the belief that "it is better than nothing" seemed to be embedded into the collective imaginary of the group. My position was that stitching itself was not enough to nurture sociological imagination, spark political action and build an informed social movement. And by informed social movement I mean working with people who already have a level of awareness of the crises caused by waste and are working

towards a better future, but haven't been exposed to concepts such as Waste Colonialism or unequal exchange—like me before embarking in this MPhil. The risk as I saw it, was that SLC might be directing their efforts to promote solutions that reproduce the crises they aim to challenge.

They constantly responded with the day-by-day practices of mending, reshaping and sharing that they and people they know have, which they articulated as practices learnt/latent from their ancestors. They also expressed concern about (a) the impact of the research on my wellbeing, and (b) in the way I disseminated the results of the research. In short, while they were working towards nurturing collective optimism, they felt that the *Buy Less, Care More* banner design, and my research more broadly depicted the ugliness of the waste crisis, generating feelings of sorrow (and despair). They were working towards nurturing collective optimism while I come with a critical framework showing the ugliness of the system. A tension between joy as practice—finding hope and beauty in the making—and me wanting to take away the joy by provoking feelings of sorrow.

These experiences led me to ask a further set of questions:

- What does it take to transcend these conversations?
- How do we disrupt the neoliberal belief in technofixes offered by the Eurocentric Waste Management model—such as recycling and donating—while empowering people?
- What methods are required to spark political action and social change?

After conversations with the Sewing café team around these questions and brainstorming ideas, I decided to transform the banner into an interactive digital object, to offer new possibilities to participants to admire the banner as a labour intense, highly skilled piece of work, while also conveying information and routes to respond to it.

Guided by Discard Studies literature, The *Buy Less, Care More* banner was interactive in two ways: the back had an outline design that invited people to write and add sticky notes with ideas of ways to reduce waste (Figure 10) aiming to challenge capitalist realism, and further information (Figures 10 and 11) including a QR code to Sewing Cafe Lancaster's webpage.
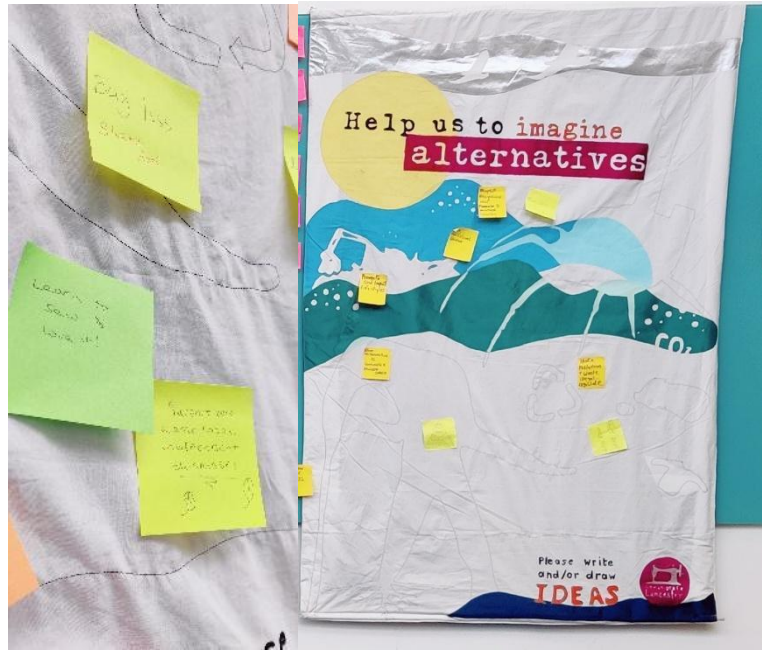
Figure 10 Reverse side of the Buy Less, Care More banner (Frausin, 2022).
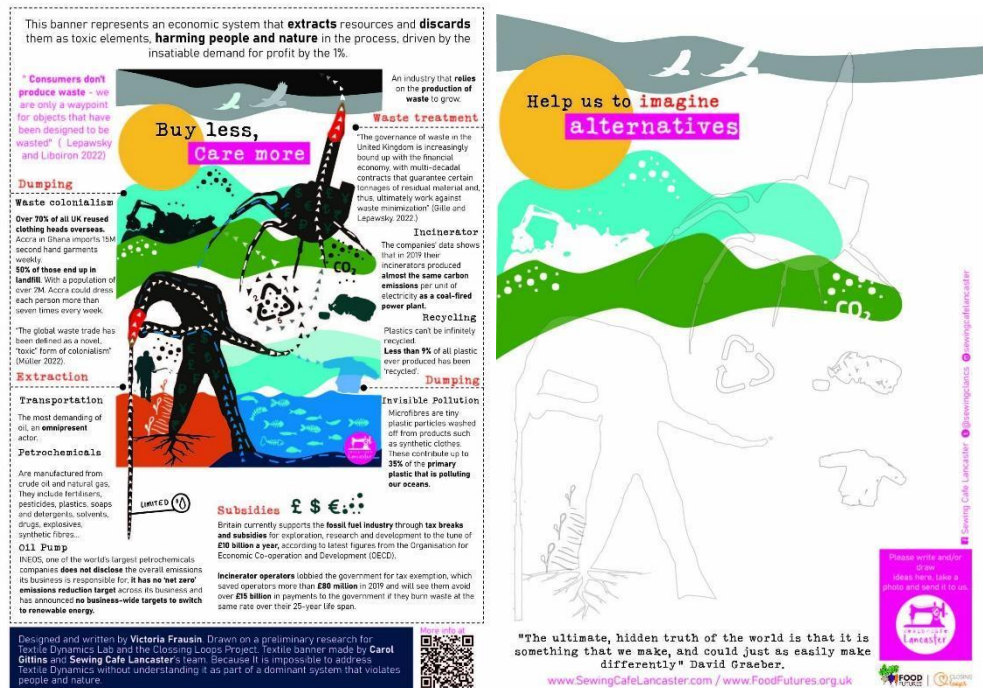
Figure 11 Front of the leaflet with information supporting the research. Right: Reverse side of the Buy Less, Care More banner (Frausin, 2022).

Figure 12 information charts (Frausin, 2022).

The Evolution

After the exhibition at the priory in Lancaster, the *Buy Less, Care More* banner was exhibited, in the same format, at two more events in 2023: at the Storey—a Lancaster creative industries centre—as part of Lancaster LITFEST, a festival of literature in March 2022, and at Fashion Revolution Week: Another worlds' event, run by Sewing Cafe Lancaster in April 2022. Although the three events had different audiences (Church goers and environmentally concerned people, literature enthusiasts, and textile/fashion lovers respectively), across the three events I found that the responses became repetitive, cantering on (1) day-by-day practices of mending, reshaping and sharing (2) individual action and blame directed at consumers. My quest for more radical responses felt futile, despite the fact that the design of the *Buy Less, Care More* banner was guided by Discard Studies literature and explicitly advocated for a systems-thinking approach—metabolism and flows, power, colonialism, greenwashing and subsidies, as well as Waste Colonialism and unequal exchange—and the accompanying information leaflet was overt about this focus.

This confirmed that visualizing complex relations of power—through the system-thinking approach—wasn't enough to provoke political action. Or to use the words of Avery Gordon "name-calling doesn't always take us closer to what animates those forces and our lives within and against them" (Gordon, 2004, p. 128). What I take from Gordon's insight, the tensions between joy and sorrow with Sewing Cafe Lancaster group and the audiences that engaged with the banner, is the need to create/enable new forms of participatory knowledge making.

To sum up, this process resulted in the realization of three key insights: **1) the need to transcend traditional ways of knowledge making/dissemination** in order to nurture

sociological imagination by connecting personal choices—acquiring, buying, mending, recycling, discarding—with large social structures, such as financial capitalism, where companies are profiting from overproduction—oil, fashion conglomerates or waste management companies, namely neoliberalism—and the ongoing colonial dynamics that underpin this system it; **2) The possible existence of alternatives in place:** I was perpetuating an ahistorical understanding of Europe as a relatively homogeneous community, dismissing the possibility of local forms of knowing and resistance. Sewing Cafe Lancaster women's insistence on building collective optimism as well the repetitive mention of day-by-day practices of mending, reshaping and sharing during the interactions with the *Buy Less, Care More* banner, can be interpreted as the possible existence of resistance to neoliberalism; and **3) utopia**, as a meeting point between joy and sorrow that could challenge capitalist realism.

Once again, I had to revisit key questions: What does it take to transcend these conversations, nurture the sociological imagination of the participants and provoke political action and social change in relationship to clothing waste and the crises it carries? What other methods for the co-production and dissemination of knowledge could I use?

The MPhil

At this point I had started my MPhil research (which I began in Jan 2023), where I found myself divided between two worlds: activism and academia. In the activist world I was working on strategies to provoke political action as an activist, community artist and designer—sentiments often labelled as naïve in the academic world (Gordon, 2004, p. 9). In the scholarity world I was trying to find my place, working on a literature review and my project proposal at the beginning of my journey as postgraduate scholar. These two parallel worlds didn't seem to interact much at the beginning, but gradually I started to see how to weave them together, a process I illustrate in the following section.

In the first part of this MPhil project, I analysed the interconnections between practices of acquiring, buying, caring, and discarding clothes with global social and environmental crises in Lancaster district, particularly the city of Lancaster and the town

of Morecambe. During this process, I encountered tensions between my role as activist and community artist and academic scholar. In this section I reflect on the process of reconciling these roles.

Weaving Scholarship and Activism

Scholarly world: Settling in

I spent the first six months of my first year on the MPhil trying to locate myself within academia. Finding my ways on the basics such as understanding how the universities online systems worked, getting around the physical university itself and tailoring the best practices for my degree, such as writing habits, how to keep notes and so on.

In the first iteration of my MPhil project, I was hoping to examine the relationship between the dumping of material waste and practices of expelling people. I aimed to explore it through two case studies focused on 1) the government of waste and 2) the government of "wasted humans" (as conceptualized by Zygmunt Bauman) in the context of UK environmental and border policies. Although I found this project exciting particularly because the links between the dumping of material waste and practices of expelling people haven't been fully explored, it was too ambitious for the time and resources.

The project became too abstract, and I found it difficult to articulate and reconcile the research/artist/activist work that was still in progress and that I had undertaken prior to the MPhil research.

Activist world: Touring the Buy Less, Care More Banner

At the same time as I was defining the parameters of my MPHIL and immersing myself in the key literatures, I was touring the *Buy Less, Care More banner* and the two practices, scholarly and activist, where already informing the other.

> Waste activism has become an important influence on waste governance, with social movements and informal waste workers at the front of these efforts (O'Neill 2019 cited by Kate Parizeau in Gille and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 267).

Quotes from the literature in Discard Studies like the quote from O'Neill above, motivated me to confront the relationship between academic and activist practices. I keep looking for strategies to engage with audiences to understand more complex flows and systems of power that sustain their work, including the activities related to waste

undertaken by Sewing Cafe Lancaster and the Closing Loops project. Guided by the work of critical waste scholars I modified ways in which participants could interact with the *Buy Less, Care More* banner, adding the questions how to Create more/less waste as a provocation exercise.

Placed in between the banner that illustrates the current system and *The Alternatives* side were two columns. On one column the participants had to imagine worst-case scenarios and write ideas on how to "Create more waste". In the other column, to imagine the best-case scenario and to think of ways to "Create less waste" (utopia). I delivered this exercise in Morecambe as part of a community day with members of the public (sticky notes), and at Lancaster university in the management school as part of a conference on waste (written text on whiteboard maker) (Figure 13 and 14).
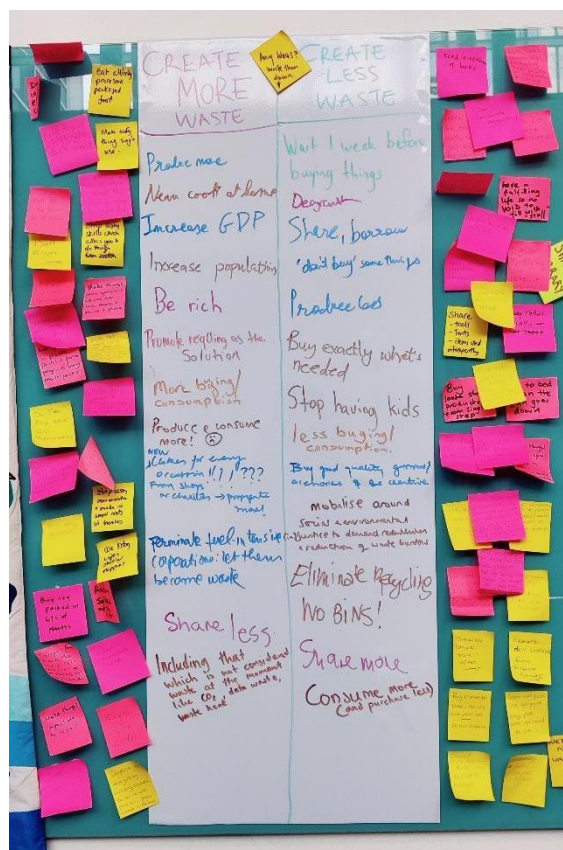
Figure 13 Participants' responses (Frausin, 2023).

Some responses overlapped (such as sharing, and changing consumer behaviour) and some were different, for example insights from academics varied from the lines of Malthusian paradigm: "stop having kids", to "Degrowth" in the section "Create less waste", and the public in Morecambe was more focused on community and wellbeing, for example one of the notes read: "have a fulfilling life, so no void to fill with stuff", or "share".

In both cases the participants seemed to engage with more complex flows and the systems of power that sustain them, and moved from limiting their diagnosis of the problem to one of individual responsibility—noting the role of corporations and governments "*Terminate fuel-intensive corporations, let them become waste*" "*Increase GDP*" "*degrowth*", "Amazon Jeff Bezos not the river" , modes of production and influencing industries "make things impossible to repair" "produce more"—which was an indicator that the activity has nurtured sociological imagination in the participants.

At the same time, none of the participants—whether the more elite, educated middle class from the management school conference or the working-class public in Morecambe— engaged in the first person, instead directing their responses as advice on what others could do: "buy," "eliminate," "share," "make," "transport," "wear," "use," "don't," "eat," "read," "learn," "consume," "produce," "stop." This suggests that both groups operate within the same paradigm overall: while they may understand complex systems of power and identify

potential actions, they appear disengaged from any possibility of personal empowerment, what later I conceptualize as one of the spells (see chapter 5).

There was still a lack of imagination for action, or if they had, the activity didn't provide the platform to express it, what made me realize the need to go back to the literature and conceptualize the problematic from a wider perspective.

Vignette Four: Buy Less Care More banner at Management School

You should have seen her face when we unrolled the banner on the floor, ready to be hung up in a very visible place in the hall. A dry ah! sound came out from the back of her throat. Eyes wide open. Then I realized how important it was to have that banner, right there at that precise moment.

It was at a conference on waste, and the banner's message Buy Less, Care More would have been in its natural place if it wasn't because the event was held at management school at Lancaster University. An irony if you understand that management schools were set up initially in universities in USA and spread around globe in elite as a colonial enterprise in the postcolonial period, to make corporations the centre of knowledge production. Management schools are an extension of the Plantationocene in order seed through elite education institutions, the neo-colonial extractive project.

I was happy to be there. The shocked woman was the event manager, she left me with Stephan[8] , an international postgraduate student that was a volunteer like me, to help me hang it up despite confessing he found the banner unsettling. Then I realized, when discussing the banner and the ways to create more/less waste, his strong views of blaming the "consumers" emerged. He stated that "the industry would not make disposable products if it wasn't demanded", and the "poor" companies have to comply. Only when I realized his background was on marketing did the penny drop. The event was going to be interesting I thought.

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[8] I have changed names to provide anonymity

And it was in many ways, although the remark of the three-day conference was at the table while having lunch, again talking about the banner and waste, when Stephan reassured a group of us that being wasteful is inborn, confessing that every time he goes for a walk in the Lake District, he has to remind himself not to leave litter in nature, he automatically drops litter on the ground and sometimes he has to go back to pick it up. "It happens to everyone, but not many confess", he concluded.

My jaw dropped, my version of the dry ah! sound come out from the back of my throat. When I could speak, I said that most of the people I have met during my life are not wasteful, quite the opposite! From people in the Amazon, West Africa I have lived and worked with in my previous lives, and those I work and hang out with in Lancaster; and that I was there, to speak for them, to honour them, with the banner.

The banner is bringing to the history of management school as a neo-colonial project and this experience—the reaction of shock by the woman and the student affirming that "the industry would not make disposable products if it wasn't demanded" or naturalizing wasteful culture—shows the success on management schools in knowledge production, to the point that people who are immerse in it are unable to reflect on their position. The banner brings an uncomfortable tension—the global crises rooted in colonialism and their role on reproducing it.

This experience also indicates that I have been successful with the aim of the banner of enacting as a vehicle for conversations and reflections and open the possibility of creating a visual theory of Waste Colonialism.

Activist world: Audits and Visits

During the second term of my MPhil, my research project and my work as an independent researcher on the Closing Loops Project (2022-2023) overlapped in investigating waste streams. Through my role as independent researcher for the Closing Loops project, I did three things:

1) Accompanied a waste audit, where Lancaster City Council studied the feasibility to reduce the size and frequency in collection of residual waste containers (grey

wheelie bin) and promote recycling to increase recyclables collections (Red/Yellow top wheelie bin) (Figure 15). As part of this audit, I shadowed waste operators and managers as they inspected household recycling and residual waste bins in two designated areas of Heysham, a seaside town near Lancaster and neighbouring Morecambe (Figure 16). This initiative was part of what the local waste management team referred to as their waste reduction strategy, with a primary focus on increasing recycling.

The audit highlighted two key insights. Firstly, it revealed a misinterpretation of the waste hierarchy, in which recycling is perceived as inherently beneficial rather than merely a less harmful alternative to recovery and disposal. Secondly, it illustrated how Lancaster City Council—using taxpayers' money—effectively subsidises global corporations in two ways: first, by enabling them to continue producing low-quality, disposable goods (companies like Shein, M&S or Primark and their suppliers that are manufacturing at high speed and low cost to keep up with constantly shifting trends), and second, by bearing the costs of their disposal.

This issue is particularly significant given that the City Council and its citizens are responsible for funding the non-profitable aspects of the waste management process, such as sorting and collection, while private companies such as Colltex and Soex operate recycling services in Lancashire. As a result, public resources are diverted away from essential services such as health and education—a dynamic explored further in Chapter 2.
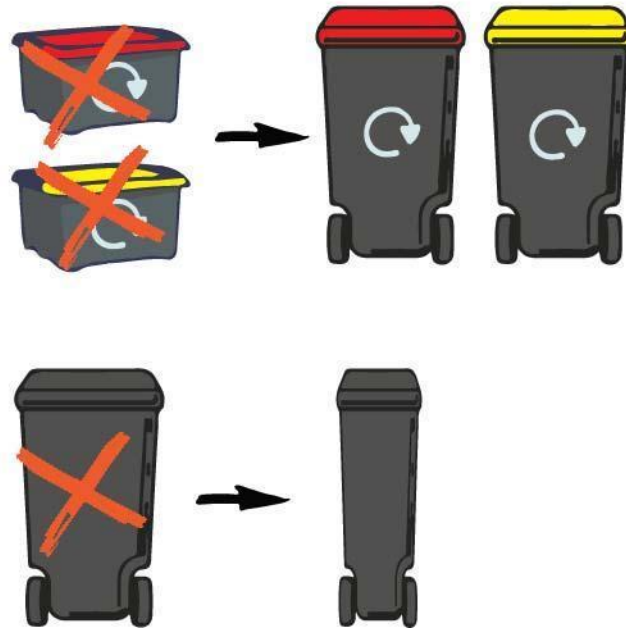
Figure 15 Bins to implement the waste-reduction strategy by the council: reducing the size of the residual waste bin and increasing the recycling containers (Frausin, 2023).

Figure 16 Waste audit day in Heysham with one of the waste collectors. Photograph by one of the Waste and Recycling Service Support Officers, June 2023.

2) Visit to Farrington Recovery Park, where household waste from Blackpool Council and Lancashire County Council is recovered, through a method called "Urban Resource—Reduce, Recovery, Recycle "(UR-3R), (Figure 17).

Figure 17 Visit to Farrington Recovery Park (Frausin, 2023).

3) Waste gathering, as part of my role of independent researcher for the Closing Loops Project and Ref/Use Lab, I gave a presentation of the results on waste recycling in the local area, in a room with residents of Lancaster, city councillors including the new cabinet member for environmental services, and a service Development manager at Lancashire County council.

In the waste audit and visit to Farrington Recovery Park, both institutions: Lancaster City council and Lancashire County council were reproducing the capitalist realism of promoting the Eurocentric Waste Management model as the only viable alternative. They were shaping and influencing local forms of common-sense thinking, by offering a framework of meaning within the logics of growth and monetarization of waste with which to make sense of the way waste should be managed.

And during the design of the presentation for the Waste gathering, in the chain of emails leading to the event where I asked the Waste Management Officers to review the presentation, I received reactionary emails for illustrating the untenability of their approaches. I was asked to abstain in sharing the figures Lancashire pays to Suez group (a French company) for landfilling despite those fees being paid by the taxpayer. I found it difficult to obtain reliable information. As the banner in the event in management school described earlier, my presentation brought the uncomfortable tension between the desire to eliminate waste and the role of the council on reproducing it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the preliminary activist work that informed my MPhil research (see timeline Figure 18). Initially, my practice in the Colombian project *Tejido Caqueteño* and the early years of The Sewing Café Lancaster was deeply entrenched in capitalist modes of (over)production and responses limited to the Eurocentric Waste Management model. It was only through three pivotal moments—the utopian vision of an alternative present facilitated by the Fashion Fictions project; the pledge made at the Food Futures gathering; and the development of methods to move towards this present during non-standard interviews—that I began to challenge the premise of capitalist realism: the belief that no better reality exists beyond the one given.
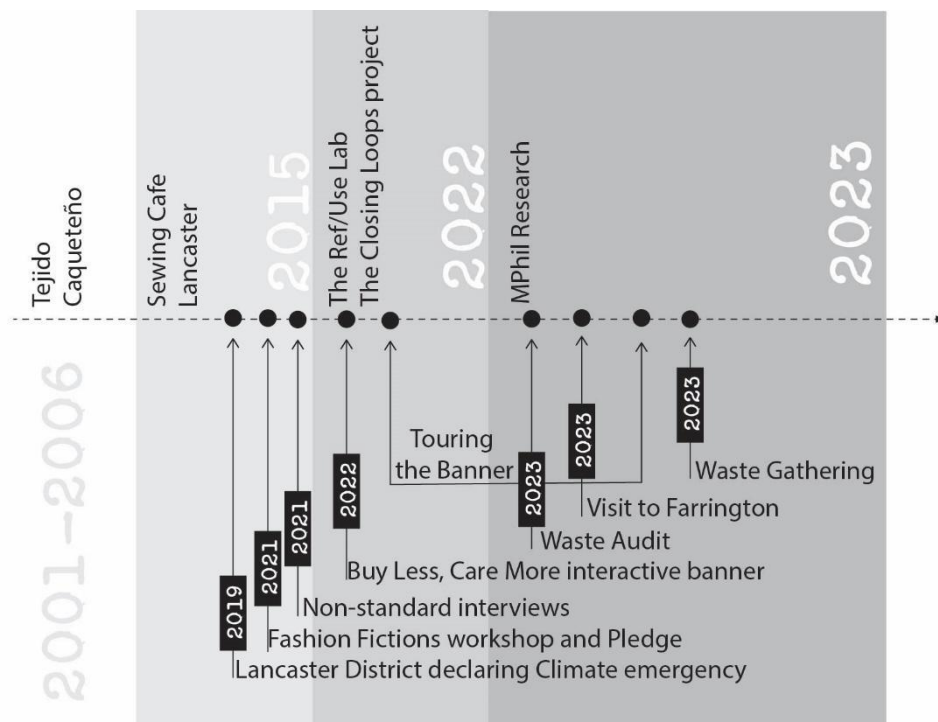
Figure 18 Timeline of my preliminary activist work and MPhil research (Frausin, 2024).

To nurture sociological imagination and spark political action, I drew on empirical work and a literature review to explore how the global waste economy operates. I presented the concept of Waste Colonialism and critiqued contemporary solutions to the waste crisis, highlighting their reliance on scientific and technological knowledge

monopolised by multinationals and governments. Conversations with the public and local governments revealed significant tensions.

The first tension emerged with waste managers at the council, who lacked autonomy due to the constraints of the Environmental Act 2021. Underpinned by a neoliberal economic agenda prioritising growth and monetisation, their strategies for waste reduction are limited to recycling, with no deeper interrogation of processes or outcomes. When questioned about the specifics—what materials are recycled, where, by whom, and for what purpose? —the response was dismissive: "they get recycled," as if the answer were self-evident and any further inquiry lacked common sense. Anything outside the Eurocentric Waste Management logic is dismissed as naive or irrelevant. For instance, in 2007, Lancashire County Council employed a Waste Minimisation Officer who initiated projects like the "Bottom Line Real Nappy Project," encouraging reusable nappies (Taylor, 2007). However, when information about such initiatives was requested, questions were either ignored or downplayed, with claims that these projects were too costly to sustain and not effective. Yet, as outlined in Chapter One, waste management constitutes the third-largest budget area after Children's Services and Social Care, with most funds allocated to private companies such as SUEZ (landfill and recycling) and Viridor (incineration).

The second tension arose from my own prejudice and evolving understanding. I had dismissed the possibility of local forms of resistance challenging the Eurocentric waste management model, perpetuating an ahistorical view of Europe as a relatively homogeneous entity. This perspective is contested by scholars like Professor Satnam Virdee, who argues that "the process of decolonizing Europe cannot stop at the shoreline of Europe" (Virdee, 2023, p. 108). Rather than disregarding local practices that resist the Take-Make-Discard (TMD) logic, I should investigate individuals, organisations, communities, and institutions—past and present—whose actions, intentional or otherwise, challenge this paradigm. Highlighting such practices could contribute to recovering sociological imagination, reviving popular memory, and inspiring political action.

The third tension emerged between joy and sorrow within The Sewing Café Lancaster team. My critical framework exposed the systemic ugliness of Waste Colonialism, while they celebrated the joy and beauty found in making. By embracing this

tension and engaging in open dialogue, transformation became possible for both parties. Without this dialogue, I might have continued illustrating systemic flaws through sorrow, alienating others, while they might not have recognised the importance of understanding the crisis through the lens of waste and transcending neoliberal notions of individual responsibility. This exemplifies genuine participation and its potential when both sides remain open to listening and learning.

Vignette Five: Nanny

I am from a transitional area between the Andes and the Colombian Amazon. A town proud of its colonial legacies founded on the cruelty towards native populations during the rubber boom of the late 19th century.

In the 1960s during the period known in Colombia as "la violencia", my nanny was one year old and her dad was killed by his neighbour for supporting a different political party. She was the youngest of many children. Her mother was illiterate and the oldest child sold the farm and sent the little ones with the mother to the closest town to live in a rented house. They survived in whatever ways possible, gradually sending the girls to work as maids in households as soon as they become competent at cleaning, cooking and ironing. After working in various places, my nanny arrived at my house when she was 17 and I one month old. At seven after surviving from Guillain-Barré syndrome and while learning to walk again, she taught me how to crochet and my love for textiles was born.

Many years later in Bogota, I graduated as a designer, from what I was told was one of the best universities at the time on the subject. The very middle-class curriculum was influenced by Italian design schools. I was trained for a world that I didn't understand never existed, and was ejected into a job market where the few options mainly included the production of crap (gimmicks, POP, disposables). So, I went back to my hometown convinced that I could do better with my privilege and inspired by my nanny's story—shared by many women in the area—and our love for yarn, I started Tejido Caqueteño. I had had my son already, and I wanted to work doing something that allowed me and other mothers to be with our children while working on something worthwhile. It ticked the boxes that mattered for me at the time for a project: textiles, women and empowerment, "I am not going to be part of the making-crap-industry" and I was sure I was able to make a path that would benefit other than big business or just my career. Then the second part of the process came: the blame.

Chapter Four: Workshop Methodology: PAR and Sharing Yarns

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss how to present the concept of Waste Colonialism within the Take-Make-Discard theory in practice with communities in the Lancaster District, and the role of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in this process. I found in PAR, as developed in Latin America, a tool to bridge my academic knowledge with my aspirations as activist-researcher to reduce the production of waste—wasted humans and otherwise—and to share that knowledge with the organizations I work with, with the hope of sparking political action in Lancaster and Morecambe. I will describe the process of developing the workshops while bringing the concept of Waste Colonialism and unequal exchange within the Take-Make-Discard theory to communities in Lancaster District. Finally, I will define and explore the potential for PAR to provide an effective platform for participants to become critically aware of the problems with mainstream approaches to waste crises. I then present the Zine I developed to use in the workshops I conclude this chapter with the process used for data collection.

How To Tell a Filthy Story in a Better Way?

As outlined in Chapter 2, the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for clothing waste in the UK carries two significant risks: first, the exportation of the majority of clothing waste to the global South, mirroring France's approach of displacing the problem; and second, the co-optation of radical concepts such as Waste Colonialism by counter-responses like the #StopWasteColonialism campaign. Within this context, I conducted a series of experiments in Lancaster and Morecambe to explore how the concept of Waste Colonialism, embedded within the Take-Make-Discard framework, could be translated into practice with local communities in the Lancaster District. The aim was to re-narrativize the concept to expose the untenability of the Eurocentric Waste Management Model, with the hope of sparking sociological imagination.

The workshops were inspired by the work of Bolivian activist, feminist, and subaltern scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, particularly her contributions to Historia Oral Andina and *Sociología de la Imagen*, as well as sociologist Avery Gordon's explorations of

utopia. These theoretical frameworks guided the workshops in two key ways: first, by examining past and present practices and institutions that have successfully resisted or reduced waste; and second, through illustrations I created using the Take-Make-Discard framework. These visual tools formed a critical narrative to expose the colonial logic underpinning the Eurocentric Waste Management Model.

For the initial workshop, I independently conducted a literature review, drafted a working definition of Waste Colonialism, and incorporated my own experiences and insights. This draft was then presented to my supervisor and collaborators, whose feedback informed the design of the first workshop. From this point onward, the research process became interactive, with each workshop building on insights gained from the previous one. Participants were aware that their feedback would shape future iterations of the workshops and the overall development of the project. This participatory approach not only integrated their perspectives but also encouraged them to adopt a critical stance towards the issues at hand.

The phrase "Breaking the Spell" emerged as a potent metaphor throughout the workshops. It aimed to foster critical awareness of the "magic" of capitalist realism—the pervasive belief that endless production and discarding can be sustained—while marginalising alternative practices as naive, outdated, or impractical. Drawing on theories of Waste Colonialism and unequal exchange, the workshops used visual imagery to reveal the unsustainability of the Eurocentric Waste Management Model and to reactivate historical memory as an anticolonial tool. These images served to document and re-signify practices that challenge the dominant narrative, offering participants a way to reconnect with alternatives to the Take-Make-Discard logic.

The theorisation of Waste Colonialism and the practices informing the workshops evolved over time, refined through the iterative process of running the workshops and engaging with long-term collaborators. In the final section of this chapter, I will present the development of the workshops in dialogue with participant inputs and the literature review discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis.

Inspiration

The workshops drew inspiration from the *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* (Andean Oral History Workshop), established in the 1980s in Bolivia by a group of Indigenous intellectuals and activists, including Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. Rooted in the methodology

of *investigación-acción* (action-research), which emerged from Bolivia's social and political movements in the 1970s (Cusicanqui, 1986, p. 2), this initiative sought to challenge dominant narratives of Bolivian history by recovering and documenting Indigenous knowledge, practices, and experiences. It has been instrumental in promoting Indigenous identity, self-determination, and anti-colonial resistance among the Aymara people.

Two activities from this initiative are particularly relevant to this project. First, the Oral History Documentation project records and archives oral histories from Indigenous communities, preserving traditions, knowledge, and resistance strategies often overlooked by colonial and national histories. Second, the Workshops and Education programme engages Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in discussions about Andean history and colonial legacies, empowering Indigenous communities by helping them reconnect with their past. Similarly, the Lancaster's workshops aimed to document and record oral histories of waste reduction practices neglected by the Eurocentric waste management model. By discussing these practices with participants, the workshops sought to empower communities and reconnect them with alternatives that challenge the Take-Make-Discard logic.

Long-term Collaborators

The workshops were supported by long-term collaborators, including *The Sewing Café Lancaster, Closing Loops Project, and Ref/Use Lab*, with whom I have maintained ongoing relationships. Our engagement involved continuous discussion and analysis before, during, and after the workshops. Additionally, *Jwllrs* and *Critical Crafts* contributed to the project, with workshops three and four developed in collaboration with them, respectively (see Table 3).

Long Term collaborators	Description	Number of people
Sewing Cafe Lancaster	a grassroots project that advocates for an ethical textile industry and regenerative textile practices	9

The Closing Loops Project	a Food Futures project that aims to stimulate a thriving local economy in North Lancashire.	7
Ref/Use Lab	a feminist Lab for more just social and environmental production policies and practices.	4
Jwllrs	an alternative art community school aimed at supporting local (to Morecambe) creative practices (especially with working class communities).	2
Critical Crafts	a project that explores how conversations about society can take place through craft and games, rather than just reading and writing, and how play is a form of critical thinking.	1

Table 3 Description of the different long-term collaborator groups and organizations (Frausin, 2024).

From March to July 2024, I met with each group individually to explain the rationale behind the workshop design and gather feedback. This feedback was then placed in dynamic conversation with input from other collaborators, allowing for an iterative development process. Their contributions varied according to their specific characteristics and areas of expertise (Table 4).

Sewing Café Lancaster enacts collective optimism through making. The Ref/Use Lab operates as a research-focused group dedicated to understanding and promoting alternative economies. Conversations with these groups led me to adopt storytelling as a tool for recovering past and present waste reduction practices and institutions within the local area. These could serve as inspiration for developing alternative economic models.

The Closing Loops project focuses on food systems, helping this MPhil project expand beyond clothing waste and incorporate broader systemic perspectives. The Jwllrs, with their emphasis on the arts and local creative practices in Morecambe, provided insights into artistic methods of knowledge dissemination. During our collaboration on Workshop Four, I connected with other groups in Morecambe, leading to the development of the Zine concept. The name Sharing Yarns emerged from this collaboration.

The Critical Crafts project prioritizes using crafting—understood as different forms of making, performing and interacting with different materials and techniques— to **facilitate conversations about social issues.** Their approach prompted me to revisit the original idea of a game I had presented in March 2022 during the event *What is Sewing Café Lancaster (SCL) all about?* discussed in the previous chapter. Together, we developed the first version of a game during Workshop Four to facilitate discussions on the clothing waste crisis. This prototype is in development by the Re/Use Lab in in collaborations with Morecambe college as part of the Morecambe Bay curriculum.

Long Term collaborators	Main Inputs
Sewing Cafe Lancaster	Collective optimism through making.
The Closing Loops Project	Expand beyond clothing waste.
Ref/Use Lab	Promote alternative economies.
Jwllrs	Artistic ways to disseminate knowledge.
Critical Crafts	Facilitate conversations about social issues through crafts.

Table 4 Specific characteristics and areas of expertise of the different long-term collaborator groups and organizations (Frausin, 2024).

Workshop Participants

I conducted four workshops as part of my practice as an activist and independent researcher with the Sewing Café Lancaster, the Closing Loops project, and as a postgraduate researcher at Lancaster University. A total of 59 participants took part, ranging from long-time collaborators integral to the project's development to individuals who were new to the issue of textile waste.

The first workshop was part of the 2024 Fashion Revolution Week event, Interwoven, held in partnership with the Sewing Café Lancaster, Closing Loops, and Ref/Use Lab, with contributions from Jwllrs. It brought together a intergenerational and

multinational participants, including my parents-in-law in their mid-70s, students in their late 20s, and members of the public connected with the Sewing Café Lancaster. Participants included two individuals from Slovenia, three from various parts of India, and others from Britain.

The second workshop was held at Miso Lounge, with Arabic participants, predominantly family groups. The third workshop took place at Morecambe Library in partnership with the Sewing Café Lancaster and Jwllrs. It involved representatives from various local organisations in Morecambe and Lancaster. The fourth workshop was held at the Gregson Centre (a local not-for-profit community centre and space in Lancaster) as part of the closing event of the Critical Crafts project. This session was attended by residents from Lancaster and Morecambe.

Defining Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In my interactions with long-term collaborators and workshop participants, I employed Participatory Action Research (PAR), drawing on my previous experience with the non-structured interviews described in chapter two; *Investigación-Acción* from Taller de Historia Oral Andina and the mid-twentieth-century work of Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, (and as interpreted through Johanne Rappaport's research over the past two decades). Rappaport's work culminated in a 2020 book titled *Cowards Don't Make History* (Rappaport, 2020), which provides a comprehensive analysis of Fals Borda's contributions.

PAR is a political project that integrates data collection with the production and dissemination of knowledge. Similar to the process described during the pen-and-paper stage of the initial interviews discussed in chapter 3, in various meetings with collaborators, I placed my findings in a reciprocal relationship with participants' views and knowledge. This approach did not require the presence of all participants simultaneously. Through this process, I complemented my own knowledge with theirs, thereby enriching the MPhil project.

Many contemporary uses of Participatory Action Research (PAR)—particularly within academic and development institutions in the Global North—have significantly diluted its radical intent. In international development contexts, PAR is often employed as a tool for community engagement or stakeholder consultation, primarily advancing the objectives of NGOs, governments, or research institutions rather than those of the

communities involved (Kindon *et al.,* 2007). These approaches tend to focus on solving immediate problems or improving local conditions, frequently without addressing the structural roots of injustice. As such, they are more practical or reformist in nature. In contrast, Fals Borda's vision of PAR was not simply about including marginalised groups in research but about transforming society by actively confronting colonialism, capitalism, and systemic inequality. Where the point of research is to change power relations (Fals Borda, 1987; Rahman, 1991).

As conceptualised by Fals Borda and Rappaport, PAR is developed through three main stages: Participation, Critical Recovery, and Systematic Devolution (see Figure 19). These stages provide a structured framework for engaging participants, recovering historical and contextual knowledge, and ensuring that the research outcomes are meaningfully reintegrated into the community.
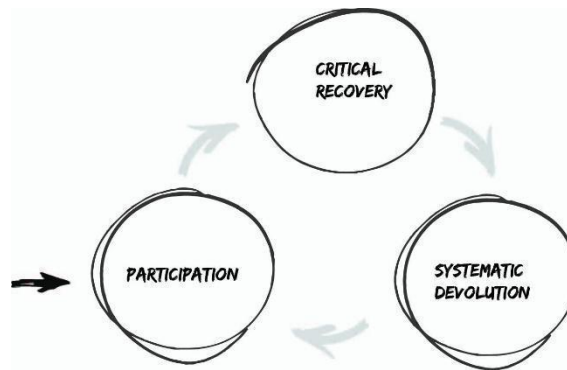
Figure 19 Three stages of PAR (Frausin, 2024).

Participation

During the participation stage, I shared the findings of my preliminary research on Waste Colonialism with both long-term collaborators and workshop participants. This process aimed to widen the conceptualization and approaches to Waste Colonialism by connecting individual actions to broader historical, economic, and unequal exchange— thus nurturing their sociological imagination. To facilitate this, I presented and discussed the results of my empirical and academic research, conducted through site visits, audits, and a literature review on clothing waste. These findings were articulated through an animated representation of the Take-Make-Discard cycle, serving as a tool for discussion and planning.

At the same time, the participants enriched my knowledge with theirs. Long-term collaborators provided guidance on the best approaches for the project and strategies for

engaging their communities. Through discussions on research questions and aims, we collaboratively analysed key issues, established a research agenda, and co-designed the workshops.

Workshop participants, in turn, contributed by offering feedback for improving future sessions. They also shared personal experiences, memories, and local knowledge, further shaping the project's direction.

Critical Recovery

Critical Recovery involves gathering insights from discussions with long-term collaborators during meetings and workshop participants, both as data collection and as a form of co-produced analysis.

At this stage, I collected stories as data and engaged in co-produced analysis, centring discussions on the question: *What practices and/or institutions have been effective in reducing waste in both the past and present in the Lancaster district?* This question serves to uncover and nurture collective imagination, helping to revive popular memory with the aim of provoking political action.

Additionally, we discussed and determined how this knowledge would be best applied in the next stage: Systematic Devolution.

Systematic Devolution

Systematic Devolution focuses on deciding how the knowledge generated should be utilised and disseminated. The results of the co-produced analysis are shared with participants and collaborators, both to communicate findings and to inspire change. This approach ensures that research outputs extend beyond academic publications, reinforcing their relevance as an activist practice.

Systematic Devolution occurs at multiple points throughout the research process, rather than solely at the stage of presenting final results (Rappaport, 2020, loc. 1853).

Level Of Commitment

The implementation of Participation, Critical Recovery, and Systematic Devolution in this project was tailored to the level of commitment of the individuals involved. Long-term collaborators actively engaged in reviewing research questions and providing feedback throughout the process. Workshop participants, on the other hand, contributed feedback primarily during the sessions, unless they participated in follow-up interactions (see Table 5).

	Lon-Term Collaborators	Workshop Participants	Follow up interactions
Participation	-Level up knowledge -Review research questions and aims. -Set up research agenda.	-Level up knowledge	
Critical Recovery	**Q:** Sharing Yarns: What practices and/or institutions have been effective in reducing waste in both the past and present in Morecambe? **-**Collect stories as data and co-produce analysis (Critical Recovery)	**Q:** Sharing Yarns: What practices and/or institutions have been effective in reducing waste in both the past and present in Morecambe? -Collect stories as data and co-produce analysis (Critical Recovery) When asking for feedback interaction with the online forms.	**Q:** Sharing Yarns: What practices and/or institutions have been effective in reducing waste in both the past and present in Morecambe? -Collect stories as data and co-produce analysis (Critical Recovery) When asking for feedback interaction with the online forms.
Systematic Devolution Ensure that the products of research would have a life beyond the	Deciding how the information should be used and disseminated as Systemic devolution.	Deciding how the information should be used and disseminated as Systemic devolution	Deciding how the information should be used and disseminated as Systemic devolution

bookshelves, in activist practice.	Q: what is the best way to disseminate the research results?	Q: what is the best way to disseminate the research results?	Q: what is the best way to disseminate the research results?

Table 5 The ways in which participants engaged with the project (Frausin, 2024).

Conclusion on PAR

I applied the three principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR)—**Participation, Critical Recovery, and Systematic Devolution**—at two levels: first, in the making of the workshops (the how: structure and design); and second, in the running of the workshops, where these principles served as the internal structure.

At the level of making the workshops, participants and I combined our knowledge (PARTICIPATION) based on feedback from previous sessions and their lived experiences. We then discussed how the workshops would be conducted, the resources required (CRITICAL RECOVERY), and how the information generated should be used and disseminated to ensure that the research outcomes had an impact beyond academic writing (SYSTEMATIC DEVOLUTION). In the case of long-term collaborators, we also co-designed the workshops, promoted the events, and shared logistical responsibilities to ensure their successful implementation. This process is represented in Figure 20 as the outer pink circles.

At the level of running the workshops, the three PAR principles were embedded into the workshop structure itself: I presented and discussed the Take-Make-Discard framework with participants (PARTICIPATION); they shared and reflected on their stories and experiences (CRITICAL RECOVERY); and we collectively discussed the most effective ways to disseminate the findings (SYSTEMATIC DEVOLUTION). This is represented in the inner circles of Figure 20 below.
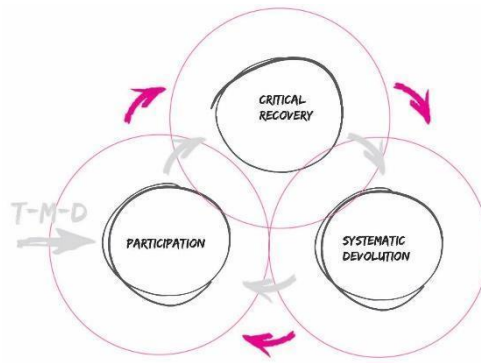
Figure 20 Representation of the three principles of Participatory Action Research used at two levels (Frausin, 2024).

In the next section, I will outline the process, practices, and learning/knowledge produced through the Sharing Yarns workshops, highlighting the key themes that emerged from the data.

PAR Within the Workshops: Baseline Presentation and Image Design

In applying Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a methodology, both the research process and the design of the workshops were guided by insights gained from the previous session. This section will explain the steps taken in the workshops, alongside the contributions made by the participants.

The conceptualisation of Waste Colonialism and the literature review underpinned the workshops. However, neither the term Waste Colonialism nor concepts like unequal exchange were directly introduced in the workshops to ensure accessibility for the public. I used simpler, clearer language and avoided academic terminology to make the content more accessible.

Each participant brought a piece of clothing they owned, which they related to the Take-Make-Discard framework. This exercise aimed to help participants understand Waste Colonialism and spark their sociological imagination through the personal connection with a garment, encouraging them to recognise alternatives beyond blaming individuals.

The workshops were structured around three pivotal points that informed the development of this MPhil, as well as the three core principles of Participatory Action Research. I will elaborate on these principles in the next section.

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Pivotal points and PAR

As described in Chapter Two, I identified three pivotal points that shaped the development of this MPhil project. The first was an imaginary world I created during a workshop, which evolved into a utopian vision of an alternative present. The second was a pledge I made at a conference, committing to try harder at addressing the issue of clothing waste. The third was the participatory methods I employed during preliminary research on waste streams in the local area. These pivotal points were instrumental in my personal journey to understand the complexities of clothing waste within the wider socio-economic context, particularly as legacies of colonialism, and to imagine and work towards alternative presents.

Building on these pivotal points, the literature review, and the three principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the workshops were structured into three stages: 1) Participation where I presented the T-M-D framework (Contextualization); 2) Critical recovery where participants shared stories related to the garments they brought with them, (Imagination).Practices and institutions that have successfully reduced waste were also discussed; and 3) systematic devolution, explored ways forward (preparation), provided feedback on the workshop itself, and discussed strategies for disseminating the information generated (See Table 6.)

	Participation	Critical Recovery	Systematic Devolution
Take-Make- Discard	Stage ONE Contextualization		
The utopian vision of an alternative future		Stage TWO Imagination	
The pledge and devising methods to move towards that future			Stage THREE Preparation

Table 6 Conceptual schema supporting the workshops (Frausin, 2024).

To sum up, in the Contextualization stage, participants were familiarised with the current model of overproduction and waste. During the Imagination stage, they were

encouraged to envision a world beyond the crises caused by overproduction and waste. Finally, in the Preparation stage, they collaboratively created a list of what would be needed to make this envisioned world possible.

Contextualization

As Avery Gordon states "We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there" (Gordon, 2004, p. 165).

Given the lack of understanding on how waste management works even amongst people working in the council, I identified the need to provide a presentation of the results of my preliminary research as a baseline for reflection, and to *know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere.*

This section involves sharing the preliminary results of my MPhil research (as described in Chapters One and Two) in an animated format. The underlying aim of this stage is to clearly articulate the problem and foster sociological imagination. This is achieved by highlighting the connections between participants' personal experiences— specifically their practices of acquiring, caring for, and discarding a garment they have with them—and broader social structures. These structures include the global economy, such as corporations profiting from overproduction across the entire supply chain, international development agencies, the financial system, and its predatory monetary instruments, as well as the enduring legacies of colonialism, such as uneven exchange.

This contextualisation is divided into three parts: the ugly, upstream waste, and downstream waste.

The Ugly

Following feedback from Workshop One, participants suggested starting with the problem, posing the question: *"Do people just need to get the annoyance out first?"* One participant, in particular, emphasised the importance of using photos rather than merely describing them. As a result, this section on *The Ugly* was moved to the beginning of the workshop and accompanied by visual imagery, as outlined below.

I begin with a provocative phrase that simultaneously addresses people and the environment, highlighting systemic racism and ecocide as core issues within the clothing industry (See Figure 21).

Figure 21 Screenshot of the first slide: The problem (Frausin, 2024).

Next, I explore in greater detail the life cycle of clothing, reiterating its effects on both people and the environment: *"soil, water, and air are polluted during the extraction, cultivation, and finishing of fabrics."* I illustrate the impact on individuals whose environments are depleted during these processes, as well as those working in precarious conditions— "wasted lives"—to produce clothes that cost less than a cup of coffee (see Figure 22).

I highlight the experiences of people in the global South periphery, as well as the widely known case of Leicester in the UK, demonstrating that both individuals in the "Global North" and the "Global South" are affected. This aligns with Satnam Virdee's argument, discussed in the previous chapter, that anticolonialism should also be recognised as an internal European struggle.
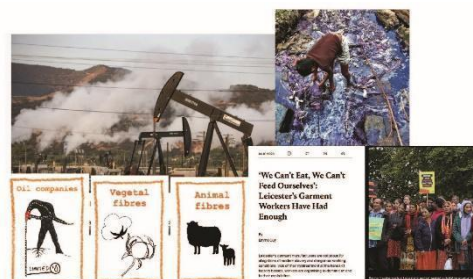
Figure 22 Screenshot of the 'People and the Elements' slide (Frausin, 2024).

I bring the discussion even closer to home by referencing the most recent case of a local business: a haberdashery that was forced to close due to its inability to compete

with cheap clothing. As one participant in Workshop Three pointed out, "*It is cheaper to buy and discard clothes than to purchase materials to make and mend them.*" (See figure 23)

Figure 23 Screenshot of the slide announcing the closure of a local business (Frausin, 2024).

From the issue of cheap production, the discussion shifts to post-consumer waste. I present a photo of a beach in Ghana littered with discarded clothes, followed by an image of a group of people in the UK protesting against incineration—a common destination for a portion of the UK's clothing waste. This comparison reinforces the point that anticolonialism should also be recognised as a European struggle. (See Figure 24)
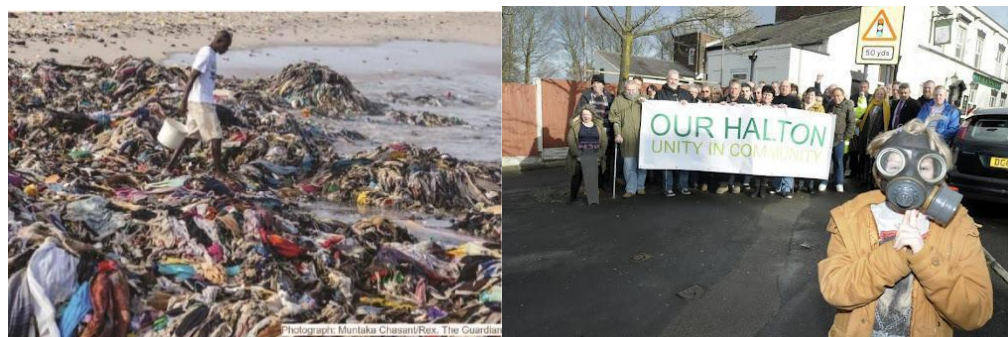
Figure 24 Screenshot highlighting the problematics of post-consumer waste in both Ghana and the UK (Choat, 2023; Jordan, 2015).

The section concludes with an image demonstrating that textile production has not yet peaked (See Figure 25).
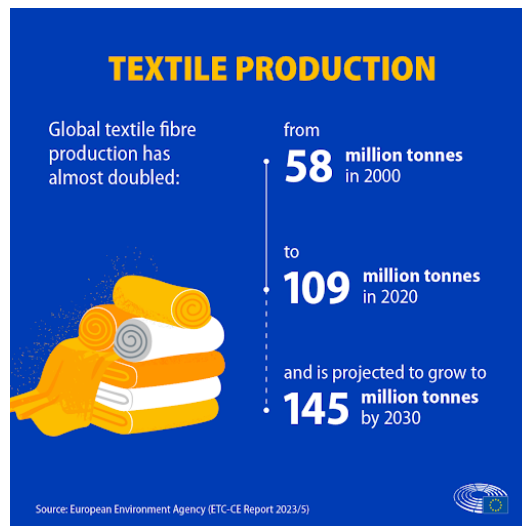
Figure 25 Image illustrating that textile production has not peaked (European Parliament, 2020).

Upstream Waste

Upstream waste refers to the waste generated before any item of clothing enters households. This part of the workshop aims to challenge the misconception that waste is solely a post-consumer issue, as highlighted in the activities under the *Buy Less, Care More banner* described in Chapter Two.

By doing so, I seek to shift the focus of blame from citizens as primary waste producers to industries, connect Waste to Colonialism, and expand the conceptualisation of waste beyond materiality to include *wasted lives*.

The presentation begins with an image of a door representing a household in Lancaster District, accompanied by the following quote:

> The Fashion industry produces 8-10% of global CO2 emissions…[it] is also responsible for ~20% of industrial water pollution from textile treatment and dyeing. It contributes ~35% of oceanic primary microplastic pollution (Niinimäki et al., 2020, p. 189).

This illustrates how material waste is generated before a garment even reaches a household. I then discuss the industries involved beyond garment construction, referring back to the information on the labels attached to the garments in participants' hands. This section encourages discussion (in pairs or groups, depending on the size of the workshop) about where the garments were made, by whom, and the accuracy of the labels.

Finally, I reveal the role of unequal exchange and colonialism by highlighting the volume of clothes imported and comparing living wages between England and Bangladesh (as an example). This emphasises that borders and unequal exchange are not natural phenomena but are rooted in colonial histories, placing colonialism at the heart of these inequalities (See Figure 26).
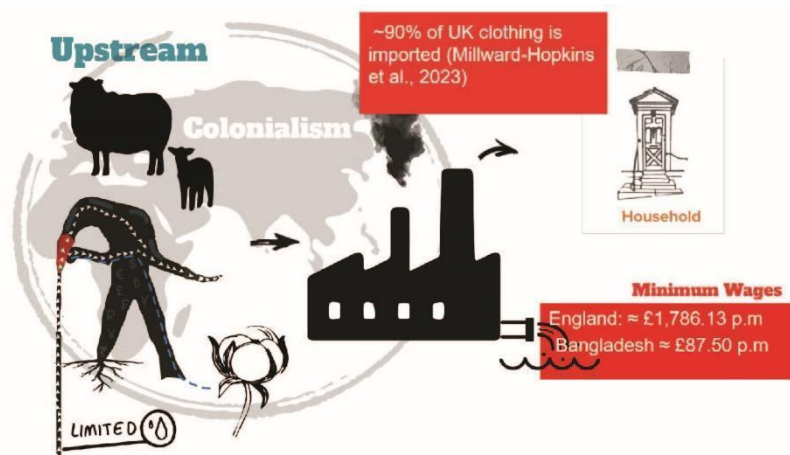
Figure 26 Screenshot of the final illustration of upstream waste (Frausin, 2024).

Downstream Waste

Downstream waste refers to the waste generated once a garment is discarded. This section draws on research conducted on waste streams in Lancaster to provide participants with an understanding of what is likely to happen to the garments they own after they are no longer in use.

In other words, this section shares the results of the first part of this MPhil research in an animated format (graphic theorisation of Take Make Discard) to foster sociological imagination. It presents the connections between participants' personal experiences of discarding clothes and the broader social structures of Eurocentric waste management, such as local councils and the global economy. Specifically, it highlights some of the waste management corporations profiting from the overproduction of waste in the district, including Viridor and Suez, as well as the international textile merchants with whom the council has agreements, such as Colltex and Soex. Additionally, it explores how these entities are linked to practices mislabelled as "circular solutions," such as charity shops, donation centres, and in-store recycling programmes (Figure 27).
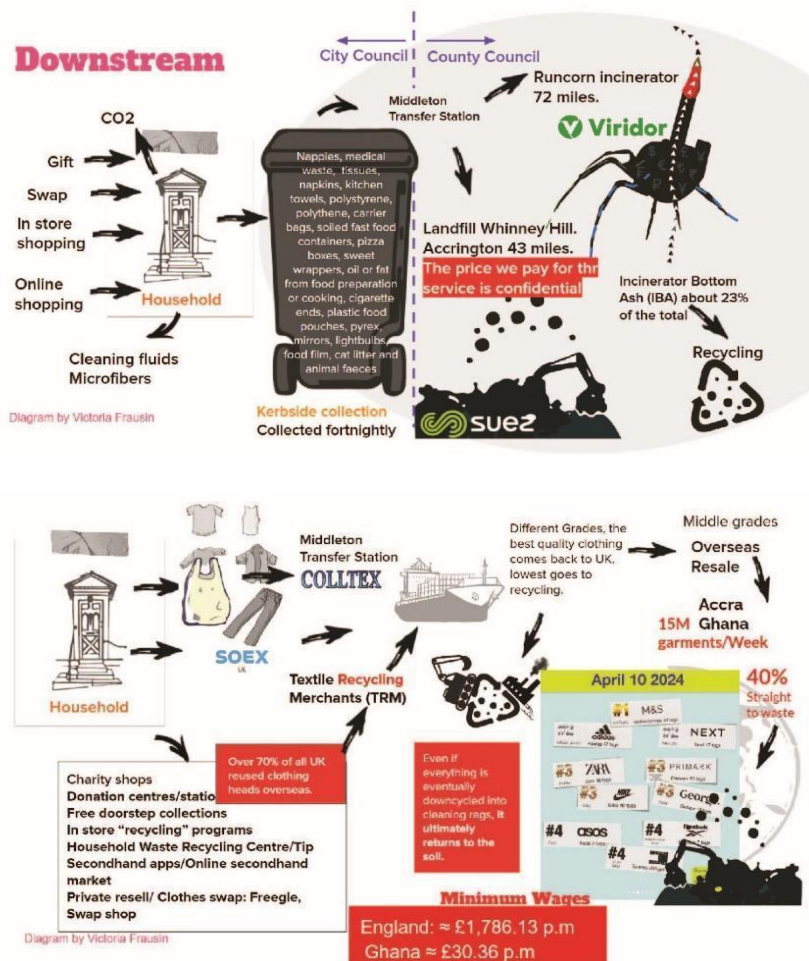
Figure 27 Screenshot of downstream waste. Top image: Discarded items in the grey bin; Bottom image: Practices mislabelled as "circular solutions" (Frausin, 2024).

Here, I present the case study of The OR Foundation and their research on the most commonly found brand on seashores, as well as the disparities in minimum wages between England and Ghana. This section underscores that unequal exchange is not a natural phenomenon but is rooted in colonialism, which perpetuates these inequalities.

This is the most complex yet engaging section for participants, as it brings the research closer to their lived experiences. Participants are encouraged to reflect on the eventual fate of their garments, either in groups or pairs, by considering where they believe their discarded clothing will end up.

Conclusion of contextualization

I conclude this section by providing a graphic overview of the Take-Make-Discard theorisation of Waste Colonialism in three steps:

Step One: An exploration of the industries and key companies involved, from extraction to disposal (Figure 28).

Figure 28 Screenshot highlighting some of the key industries (left) and companies (right) profiting from Waste Colonialism (Frausin, 2024).

Step Two: Highlight that the primary aim of these companies is to generate profit at all costs. This is illustrated through three relevant examples discussed during the workshops: example one is the licenses to fossil fuel companies in occupied Palestine by the state of Israel, illustrating the profiting from an ongoing genocide; example two is oil and gas exploration in the Amazon, illustrating the profiting on the degradation of indigenous land; and the third is a local example of the company SUEZ, which profits from waste generated in the Lancaster district despite facing significant budget cuts and financial instability (Figure 29).

These examples exemplify the logics of Waste Colonialism, which is characterised by territorial expansion, economic exploitation, cultural assimilation, suppression, and oppression throughout the entire lifecycle of clothing, along with the establishment of transnational monopolies controlling extraction, production, and waste management.

Figure 29 Screenshot highlighting key companies profiting from Waste Colonialism and the perpetuation of wasted lives (Frausin, 2024).

Step Three: This step illustrates how waste management companies promote so-called green solutions, such as waste-to-energy initiatives and green transitions, without acknowledging the finite nature of the planet. These companies fail to recognise that wasted lives are not the result of isolated technological deficiencies requiring improvement but are instead inherent characteristics of the design and production processes. By focusing on superficial changes, they avoid addressing the root cause of overproduction—a form of *gatopardism* (changing everything so that nothing fundamentally changes) (Figure 30).
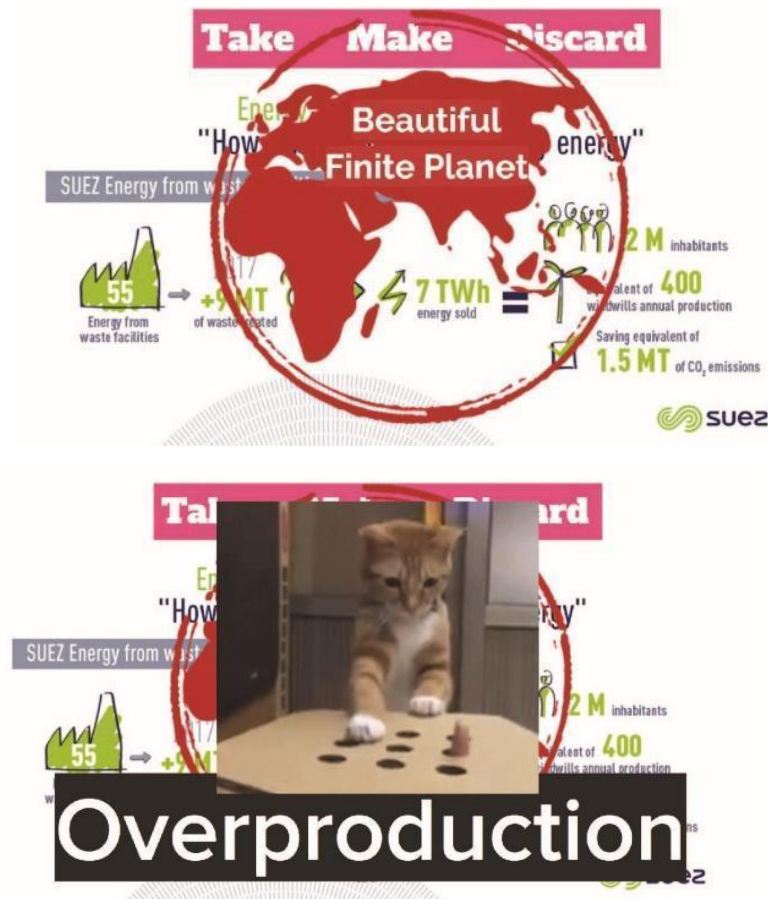
Figure 30 Screenshot highlighting how some key waste management companies promote gatopardism (Frausin, 2024).

Here the contextualization part ends in order to follow with the imagination.

Imagination: The Utopian Vision of an Alternative Present

This section shifts from contextualization to imagination. Participants share stories of the garments they own, as well as practices—both past and present—that have been successful in reducing waste. They also discuss the possibilities of living in a different world. This process is akin to the Oral History Documentation undertaken in Bolivia, which records and archives the oral histories of Indigenous people. However, here the stories focus on waste reduction practices by residents of the Lancaster district, practices that have often been overlooked or stigmatized by the Eurocentric waste management model.

Here I use the concept of utopia—as conceptualized by Avery Gordon, that understands it as existing "*in all those examples of the things we are and do that exceed or are just not expressions of what's dominant and dominating us. It exists when there is no painful split between the dream world and the real world; when revolutionary time*

doesn't stop the world but is rather a daily part of it" (Gordon, 2004, p. 214). I use this concept to reconcile the tension between sorrow—the realization of the brutality of the Take-Make-Discard framework and the false circular solutions promoted by the market—and joy—the connection participants have with their special garments and the memories they evoke. This approach links sociological imagination with collective optimism.

By identifying local revolutionary examples that are already part of everyday life, my aim is to highlight practices that *do not stop the world but are integral to it*, and to re-narrativize practices of acquiring, wearing, caring for, and discarding clothing outside the Take-Make-Discard framework. Through fostering a collective interpretation of these practices and engaging with popular sentiment and historical knowledge, the goal is to provoke political action.

The Eurocentric waste management model considers waste management solely from the perspective of industrial infrastructure. It legitimizes the imposition of infrastructures dealing with waste based on modernisation, science, and engineering solutions, framing these efforts as a heroic, civilising endeavour (capitalist realism). In contrast, storytelling—or the sharing of yarns—acts as a counter-narrative, unearthing and revealing layers of collective memory buried within the managerial, centralised Eurocentric discourse on waste.

Practices such as wearing second-hand clothing, repairing, sharing, swapping, passing down, and bin-digging have been stigmatized as precarious, often relegated to the poor or the naïve, by neoliberal markets, models of overproduction, and the vast infrastructures of the Eurocentric waste management system. However, when viewed from a different perspective, these practices can be seen as forms of resistance that persist, expressing continuity and autonomy outside the Take-Make-Discard logic. These acts challenge the mainstream discourse, which tends to portray humanity as inherently wasteful by nature.

These utopian practices, disconnected from the logics of growth and monetarization of all relations, exist here and now. They have the potential to function as anti-colonial tools—re-narrativizing, re-signifying, and reframing the world—while reclaiming control over the alternatives alienated by the current Eurocentric waste management model. This model survives by producing and sustaining "wasted lives" By nurturing sociological imagination, these practices may even provoke political action.

Preparation: Devising Methods to Move Towards that Present

The following quote from Avery Gordon's *Hawthorn Archive* (2017) serves as the inspiration for this section:

> You have to practice it with others. You have to prepare. And when you do that long enough, it's no longer refusal anymore. It's just your life... [Preparation for something else matters because it] "marks the moment when their permission doesn't matter anymore; marks the moment when you'll never be turned, even if they take you back; marks the moment when something else has to be next; marks the moment when the 'not-yet' is already here, because you become unavailable for servitude, back stiff with conviction (Gordon, 2017, p. 184).

Gordon's work on preparation and refusal—on becoming unavailable for servitude—guides this section. It encourages us not only to envision the world we would like to live in but also to consider the kind of society and people capable of and desiring to live in such a world, and to prepare for it.

Once participants have understood the problems with current models of (over)production (contextualisation), shared successful stories, and imagined a better world (imagination), this section focuses on reflecting on the actions needed to move towards that alternative world. Drawing parallels to the Workshops and Education Activities of the Historia Oral Andina, which empower communities to reconnect with their past and reconcile with stigmatised practices, this section aims to inspire participants to identify and prepare for the changes necessary to live differently.

As prompts, I share the following tips:

1.   **If you feel stuck and overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable negative impacts of every step, take heart!**

Remember that the untenable Take-Make-Discard culture is a recent phenomenon. People have inhabited this planet for millennia, and even today, not everyone is immersed in this logic.

2.   **Reflect on practices and institutions that have been effective in reducing waste, both in the past and present.**

Examples include jumble sales, clothing libraries, or family garments passed down through generations, as well as other practices discussed in previous sections of the workshops.

3.   **Consider the scale of current waste management infrastructure.**

In Lancashire County Council, waste management is the third-largest budget area after Children's Services and Social Care, with a 2024/5 net budget of £77.652 million—and yet, it is still insufficient. How could this money and labour be better spent?

4.   **Imagine yourselves as runaways from the untenable Take-Make-Discard system.**

You are escaping from a world where the production of wasted lives is not an unfortunate accident but a fundamental feature. What actions are required? What do you need to prepare?

Rather than providing a finished list of instructions, this section serves as a provocation for critical reflection on the spells cast by the Eurocentric waste management model—spells that keep us trapped in its logic.

Conclusion PAR Within the Workshops

These three sections of the workshops incorporate the key concepts of my theorisation of Waste Colonialism—such as unequal exchange, *gatopardism*, Integrated World Capitalism, and neoliberalism—as well as anticolonial approaches including utopia, and storytelling. These concepts are embedded within the graphic Take-Make-Discard theory that I presented to and developed with communities in the Lancaster District. The aim is to debunk capitalist realism and mainstream solutions, such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), by offering alternative frameworks for understanding and addressing waste crises.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) provided the structure for the workshops and served as a platform for simultaneously collecting information and producing and disseminating knowledge. PAR emphasises the dual role of participants as both attendees and collaborators, fostering critical awareness of the limitations of mainstream approaches to waste crises. It also encourages participants to contribute to the development of strategies for disseminating the knowledge produced, empowering them to become active agents of change.

Data Analysis

Data was gathered throughout the workshops and retrospectively through follow-up interactions. During the workshops, the data collected allowed me to capture participants' responses as they learned about Waste Colonialism through the garments they held.

The retrospective data was collected via an online survey and feedback through email, providing a wealth of information. Photos were also taken during the sessions and/or shared afterward. This data captured participants' thoughts as they reflected on the information presented, the garments they owned, and the memories or practices and institutions—both past and present—that have been successful in reducing waste.

Given the varying nature of the interactions, some research activities were audio recorded, while other data was collected using Mentimeter, and through notes taken during the sessions. Feedback (co-analysis) from the workshops was recorded and directly transferred into the planning of the next workshop. Data related to garments was analysed using Atlas.ti and thematic coding.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the methodology and implementation of workshops designed to engage communities in Lancaster District with the concept of Waste Colonialism within the Take-Make-Discard framework. Through Participatory Action Research (PAR), the workshops bridged academic knowledge with activist aspirations, fostering critical awareness of waste management issues and their colonial underpinnings. Inspired by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's work and Avery Gordon's theories, the workshops utilized storytelling, visual tools, and collaborative discussions to challenge dominant narratives and imagine alternatives to current waste practices.

The iterative process of conducting four workshops with diverse participants and long-term collaborators like The Sewing Café Lancaster and Closing Loops Project enriched the research through continuous feedback and co-design. By employing PAR's three stages—Participation, Critical Recovery, and Systematic Devolution—the workshops not only identified effective waste reduction practices but also empowered participants to envision and work towards alternative futures.

Data collected through various methods, including surveys, emails, and session recordings, highlighted the importance of reconnecting with marginalized practices and

institutions that resist the Eurocentric waste management model. This chapter demonstrated how PAR can serve as a powerful tool for both understanding and addressing complex socio-environmental issues, promoting collective action, and inspiring political change beyond academic circles.

Vignette Six: The Sewing Café Lancaster

Initially there were two of us very committed to The Sewing Café Lancaster, and a few more coming and going, plus some people supporting us in the background. The group grew over the years and we have run regular mending sessions in pubs, libraries, community centres, market square and wherever we could get in. We made upcycled products either to fundraise or raise awareness. We hosted talks, films and clothes swaps and established a yearly Fashion Revolution Week event. Almost a decade later we work in collaboration with other groups and networks and have a natural dyes group with a natural dyes garden, the community banner and tapestry making group, broken umbrellas project. We run a weekly Sewing circle for refugees and asylum seekers, are establishing mending stations around the city, have the SewandSow boxes around town. We also have a YouTube channel, and created sibling projects such as the Textile Dynamics Lab and the Textile Care Collective. On top of one-off projects such as the unlicking lockdown and Lancaster Loves clothes map. You name it, we have tried or are on it.

We also got linked with other groups and researchers, even someone from Australia who was investigating ways that, in her own words "being hands-on with clothes (making/mending/thrifting/upcycling) can help reduce textile waste and enhance wellbeing". All of the above with the support of people, organizations and grants. A total success in many ways but the panorama outside of the bubble didn't seem to turn in the direction I was expecting.

By then I knew a bit better that the mirrored-tables-effect wasn't the fault of the Chinese, all Asians and everyone else for making everything cheap and forcing me to lower the price and exploit my friends if I wanted to continue the project. Neither the poor people in my country voting for neoliberal policies, or those buying from Primark in the UK. What is missing? I kept asking.

Chapter Five: Results Breaking the Spells of Waste Colonialism: Rethinking Responsibility, Practices, and Power

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the development process of the Take-Make-Discard graphic and the Sharing Yarns workshops. This graphic was created as part of my participatory action research (PAR) on Waste Colonialism with communities in Lancaster and was underpinned by my development of the concept of Waste Colonialism. The aim of this graphic was to support efforts to "break the spell" of 'capitalist realism'.

In this chapter, I will outline the process, practices, and knowledge generated during four "Sharing Yarns" workshops held in Lancaster and Morecambe in May and June 2024. This chapter aims to examine how theories of Waste Colonialism might influence social practices related to textile waste. Additionally, it explores how PAR methods could help break the spell of colonial capitalist systems surrounding textile production, use and discard.

Drawing on the workshop data, the chapter illustrates tensions between public understanding of "consumer behaviour" as the root cause of Waste Colonialism and practices outside of Take-Make-Discard that coexist alongside colonial capitalist logics. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the 'spells' cast by the Eurocentric Waste Management model, which perpetuate business as usual, hence reinforcing capitalist realism.

The Garments

As discussed in the previous chapter, each participant brought a personal garment of their choice to the workshop (Figure 31). Reflecting on a personal item was intended to serve as a means of bridging personal experiences with broader systems of power, enabling participants to situate their garments within the Take-Make-Discard framework.

A key thread that ran through the workshop discussions, was a disjuncture between participants' expressions of the roots of the problem with Waste Colonialism (which in turn I understand as a manifestation of the "spells"), and their personal clothing practices (the shared yarns). On the one hand, participants articulated their belief in: (a) individual responsibility (being less wasteful), (b) the importance of education (becoming more environmentally conscious consumers), and (c) the necessity of greener production technologies. On the other, the participants emotional relationship with items of clothing fell outside of the Take-Make-Discard logics of the market. This contradiction between an acceptance of mainstream thinking as to causes/solutions and actual practices is one of the key findings of this project.

Individual Responsibility

Across all workshops, participants predominantly framed individual blame and improved consumer practices as the primary problem/solution approaches in envisioning a utopian future free from Waste Colonialism. Examples of suggested "solutions" included:

- Extending Fairtrade principles to garments;
- influencing people both online and offline to choose alternatives to fast fashion, thereby making local purchasing more attractive;
- weighing household waste to reduce the amount discarded.

Participants often framed the "problem" as one of over-consumption. As one participant in Workshop Two noted, "overproduction is driven by overconsumption; if

there is demand, there is production." This view was echoed in other events, such as at the Management School workshop (see vignette in Chapter Two), where a student stated, "*The industry would not make disposable products if it wasn't demanded*." Similarly, members of the Sewing Café Lancaster used narratives of blame during the *Buy Less, Care More* banner-making sessions, pointing to fast fashion consumers who fail to mend or recycle their clothing.

This widespread framing of individual responsibility as a driver of the Take-Make-Discard system aligns with the legal definitions of waste (as discussed in Chapter One). By limiting the definition of waste to the product level, the Eurocentric Waste Management Model perpetuates the paradoxical notion that overconsumption—rather than overproduction—is the root of Waste Colonialism. Consequently, residents are chastised to "buy better" (e.g., Fairtrade, local, compostable products), demanding sacrifices from individuals while multinationals continue to profit from overproduction.

These corporations sustain business as usual by incentivising increased consumption through ever-improving advertising techniques, attractive product designs, and low prices while promoting mainstream solutions that don't address the historical legacies of colonialism and ongoing colonial dynamics as illustrated with the case of #StopWasteColonialism Campaign in Chapter one. Within this framework, shared political responsibility between industry, government, and citizens remains absent, as well as anticolonial demands addressing unequal exchange and the production of wasted lives—the key feature of the global modes of (over) production.

Lack of Education

A key finding from the workshops was the surprise participants expressed when carefully examining the labels on their garments. Many were shocked to discover that their garments had been manufactured in locations different from what they had initially believed. For example, during Workshop Three, one participant remarked, "I thought it was made somewhere fancy like Belgium," while another stated, "I thought it was from London, given that it looks fancy and it belonged to my older brother."

Another significant revelation was the participants' misunderstanding of how the second-hand clothing market operates. For example, one participant said:

I used to think that it would go to somebody. I used to think that when I'm giving my clothes to charity, I thought they would go to the needy... I am shocked that it doesn't."

Participants were further surprised to learn how much waste produced by multinationals is subsidised by taxpayers. A participant in Workshop Four reflected: *"One of the main things that stuck in my mind was the huge amount of money LCC spends on waste disposal"*.

These realisations led to a consensus on the need for increased education. As one participant in Workshop Two noted, "*Excessive wealth generates more waste. However, this can be rechannelled by education and awareness into better use*." Another participant suggested that the workshop format should be adapted for schools, proposing the development of "*Fairtrade games*" to teach children about these issues.

The "Right Technology"

Despite their surprise and calls for education on the unsustainability of the Take-Make-Discard system, participants continued to view technological solutions as the key to addressing production and the challenges of waste-management. They discussed the potential of new manufacturing technologies, such as: Fabrics with silver fibres to reduce odours and limit washing frequency, thereby cutting down on water and detergent use; Non-iron materials; Recyclable and biodegradable textiles; Fabrics designed to be separable for fibre reuse.

Participants also emphasised the importance of using renewable energy for managing waste across all levels, including transportation.

In summary, participants focused on individual responsibility, education, and the promise of technological advancements as solutions to waste-related problems. However, these discussions rarely challenged the capitalist logic underpinning the Take-Make-Discard system. In contrast, the personal stories participants shared about their garments often revealed alternative understandings and textile-use practices that fundamentally contested this logic.

Tracing Place and Friendship Across Different Generations.

One compelling example emerged in a workshop where Andy[9], a man in his thirties, brought a second-hand T-shirt he had purchased for £1 at a charity shop in Morecambe (see Figure 31). He recounted:

> As soon as I saw it, I knew I was going to buy it, because I love aliens. Then I realised it had Morecambe written on it, and at the back a story of an alien encounter in the bay, it is my favourite t-shirt since. I have been asking around and found that there was a shop called Magenta that closed a while ago. They sold candles and other stuff as well as some clothes, but that is all I could find out.

Figure 32 Left: Participant wearing the Alien T-shirt. Photograph by Amy Dickson (2024). Right: Image of the Alien T-shirt used in the promotion of the Sharing Yarns workshop in Morecambe (Jwllrs, 2024).

A fortuitous event during preparation for the next workshop brought further insight into Andy's story. While contacting various groups to recruit participants, we met the daughter of the woman who owned *Magenta* shop a decade earlier. She revealed that Andy's T-shirt was part of a custom order by a local woman who had experienced the alien encounter. Astonishingly, this woman turned out to be the mother of one of Andy's closest friends.

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[9] All pseudonyms and details have been changed to protect anonymity.

If, as Alison Settle observed, "*fashion is an expression of the world we live in, a picture of what is going on inside our minds as well as outside in historic fact*", Andy's T-shirt encapsulated a profound interplay of personal experience, place, and historical change. It represented the Morecambe of the early 2000s, where locally made and sold garments were still common, juxtaposed with the Morecambe of today—a town marked by austerity, deepening poverty, and the dominance of charity shops selling second-hand clothing.

During the workshop, discussions about Andy's T-shirt highlighted the disappearance of independent shops and the socio-economic transformations that reshaped the town. *Magenta* closed due to family issues at a time when neoliberal policies drove the globalisation of clothing production, encouraging cheap imports. Mass-produced garments, devoid of ties to place, became commodities designed for rapid turnover—sold in supermarkets alongside groceries—rather than items meant to last, fostering memories and resisting the logic of Waste Colonialism.

Enchanted Objects and Anticolonial Possibilities

Andy's T-shirt, through the layers of stories it evoked, became an "enchanted object" that linked place (Morecambe Bay), friendship, generations, and historical change, transcending its status as a mere commodity.

Understanding garments as enchanted objects offers a potential anticolonial device, as drawing on historical memory can reframe how clothing is valued, countering the fast-fashion agenda of transnational monopolies. These corporations' profit from the expropriation of land in the global South periphery for overproduction and discard. Andy's T-shirt, made in the early 2000s, reflected a time when clothing was designed to be worn multiple times. Today, fast fashion dominates, with garments sold in supermarkets by multinational monopolies at low prices, incentivising overconsumption and rapid disposal.

This delivers huge profits to clothing companies as well as to waste management multinationals. These profits derive from the billion-dollar global trade in second-hand clothes (e.g., unsold charity shop items shipped to international textile merchants, as discussed in Chapter 2) or from Eurocentric waste-management infrastructures, such as incinerators, if the garments happen to end up in the residual waste collected by the

council, subsidized with taxes paid by citizens, diverting funds that could otherwise be spent on public services like health or education (as outlined in Chapter 2).

A similar example of an "enchanted garment" was shared in Workshop One by Vanessa, a participant in her sixties, who brought a stained and filthy coat she had acquired for £1. She recounted an excellent story about obtaining the money to pay for the coat (having forgotten her purse), its subsequent series of washes, resizing it, and her research into its origins, tracing it back to Dublin during a time when handlooms were a significant part of the local economy. Vanessa expressed great pride in this coat, which, as she described, had sparked numerous conversations since its purchase.

Joy in Alternative Practices

Other participants expressed joy in rescuing clothes or engaging in unconventional clothing practices, even when these were stigmatised. In Workshop Four, one participant shared a story about finding a waterproof jacket with a broken zip sticking halfway out of a public waste bin. He repaired the jacket and gave it to a friend. Another participant admitted to diving into skips to rescue clothing, once falling inside a skip, leading to her neighbours questioning whether she had conducted a risk assessment beforehand.

In Workshop Three, one participant reflected on how her family had looked down on her for over 25 years because she bought clothes from charity shops. She humorously noted that they often teased her for being the only person they knew who could leave a charity shop wearing a completely different garment from the one she had entered in, and expressed she was glad to be with similar minded people.

These examples highlight how alternative practices exist outside the Take-Make-Discard logic. Although such practices were sometimes stigmatised—such as the charity shopper's experiences—they also provided value to participants. Some felt proud of their efforts, for instance, proclaiming they were *"the only person they knew that used second-hand only,"* while others demonstrated virtuosity, as seen in the story of the rescued jacket that was repaired and gifted to a friend.

Memories and Emotional Connections

Different facets of the "enchanted garment" continued to emerge during the storytelling. Participants described memories attached to garments that made them reluctant to

discard these items, even if they had not been worn in some time. Examples included a dress tailored by a friend, a traditional Kurti, or a belt from the past.

In the workshops, participants went through a cycle of (1) surprise (the discovery that the garment they had was from China not "somewhere fancy"), (2) questioning (why did they assume and never checked the label?) and (3) reconnecting (knowing the origin of the garment didn't change the fact it was special for them). In contrast to the common-sense idea of "*people just want new clothes*", the garments people brought sparked pride and joy that challenged the Take-Make-Discard logic of the market.

The Spell of Capitalist Realism

Yet when the conversation moved on to why there aren't independent shops like Magenta anymore, local handlooms producing speciality coats, or more people rescuing clothing from bins, the responses were the epitome of capitalist realism. Amongst them were responses such as "*it would be too expensive for people to afford them*", "*UK only produces coarse wool that isn't suitable to make t-shirts*", or "*people are not interested*" what I would categorise as the spell of <u>"there is no alternative".</u>

Other responses, such as "*If people used the power of their wallet by not buying cheap but only good quality, maybe there would be speciality shops*," or "*There should be a Fairtrade scheme for clothing*," exemplify what can be categorised as the spell of <u>"consumer purchasing is the only power."</u>

Additionally, fantasies about new technologies dominated many discussions, encompassing hopes for more efficient, less wasteful, and greener energy sources, as well as the development of innovative materials—such as fabrics made from mushrooms or waste products—without sufficient consideration of the long-term effects of such technologies.

The Three Spells

Spell ONE: "There Is No Alternative"

In response to the question, "*What practices and/or institutions have been effective in reducing waste in both the past and present in Lancaster district?*", participants demonstrated some collective understanding of alternatives. Among the suggestions were clothing libraries—where people become custodians of garments—and "*rag and*

bone men," who came door-to-door to collect and redistribute clothing. These figures were fondly remembered by older participants, one of whom described a rag and bone man who gave goldfish in exchange for second-hand goods: "*I clearly remember how happy I felt about the polythene bag with a goldfish inside hanging from the handlebar of the rag and bone man*".

Jumble sales were the most frequently cited event by older British participants in the workshops, remembered with joy as a fun community practice.

Jumble sales involved selling second-hand items donated by the community at very low prices. Particularly popular from the mid-20th century to the 1980s, these events were central to working-class community life, offering affordable second-hand goods when new items were expensive or difficult to acquire. Participants explained the atmosphere: "*It was fun ... like a party, with cakes, lucky dip and tombola, more like a village fair ... you had to arrive early, better if you volunteer to have the first choice ... gosh it was noisy*".

These sales were also the starting point for discussions about other goods sold at the time, including furniture and bric-a-brac. "*Everything but underwear*," someone remarked. Conversations expanded to describe markets of the past, where essential goods were delivered by local tradespeople, such as fishmongers, butchers, and the "*pop man*," who collected glass bottles with rubber stoppers, offering small sums in return.

This nostalgia led to reflections on the caring practices of the time: washing clothes in the same water starting with whites, turning collars to avoid frequent laundering, and keeping a button tin passed down through generations. Participants also recalled skilled workers, like knife or scissors grinders, who went door-to-door offering repairs.

When asked the difference between jumble sales and charity shops: participants noted that "*charity shops are expensive*" "*jumble sales were more a social event*" "*they have different demographics*" and "*the world was different*".

Some participants raised the dichotomy between gender equality and these traditional practices: "*women have more opportunities now*" "*women had more time then*" "*women's equality means that they don't have time to devote to local community activities*". This was an interesting observation on the ways in which gender equality in the workplace was perceived by participants as having negative impacts on the life of the

community, leading to the demise of thriftiness and community-based practices of social reproduction.

Spell TWO: "Consumer Purchasing Is the Only Power".

One participant in workshop two explained how wealth contributes to waste:

> When money creates waste, it doesn't create prosperity… it's a false prosperity because [let's say] I buy ten suits, and what I do with the ten suits I don't wear them, they just sit there. What does it mean? I need a bigger wardrobe, I need a bigger room-waste, I need a bigger, bigger, bigger. So, all that waste. So, I am creating a bigger factory, a bigger house, bigger energy bills, a bigger storage, and then what? Waste, I throw them. And that nobody looks at it in that sense, but we come and show look I have a bigger house, with a bigger wardrobe with a hundredth shoes on it. A hundred suits in it. Hundredths! Who wears them?

This quotation illustrates how, despite narratives of individual blame ("I am creating a bigger factory by buying more"), the workshops facilitated broader discussions on economics and scale. For instance, the same participant described working for a wealthy individual in Saudi Arabia who drove the same car for years and wore simple garments because he didn't need to "pretend," contrasting this with the behaviour of "poor" people that have the need to have more clothes, newer and more often to hide their condition of being working class. Eg. To avoid the stigma of being poor.

A heated discussion arose during workshop four about political solutions versus individual actions. When one participant proudly shared details of a community clothes swap she organises, another participant argued that such initiatives merely serve to "make her and her community feel better" and that real change could only occur at the political level.

Other relevant reflections on wealth and productivity that were made by workshop participants included:

- Prioritize wealth over consumption: *wealth includes access to services, clean water and nature and facilities*
- Questioning productivity: *-is that all the economy can be? What do we measure? [We need] new economic models [and a] shift of priorities.*

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Interestingly, these deeper reflections on inequality and economics emerged only after an hour of discussion, during a section focused on imagining a world free from Waste Colonialism. These reflections challenged initial responses, such as the suggestion that consumers should simply "buy better quality," "only buy compostable goods," or "support locally made products." The participants began to break the spell of "consumer purchasing as power."

Spell THREE: "Short-Term Fantasies"

Spell Three relates to widely accepted technological solutions within the Eurocentric waste management model (discussed in Chapter 2), such as recycling. I characterise this system as a short-term fantasy solution, since it neglects the negative impacts on the people and environments burdened with waste materials, as well as the energy, water, and transport required to process or offshore waste from the Global North to the Global South.

Let me explain how I saw Spell three manifest. During the workshops, some participants juxtaposed individual responsibility with blind faith in recycling. For example, there were suggestions that we should "use textiles that are separable for fibre reuse", while others argued that what was necessary was "reporting and promoting responsible recycling." One group advocated for the use of renewable energy at "all levels of waste management" Questions about the relationship between the existing waste management infrastructure and the global crises they are supposedly meant to ameliorate were notably absent. Participants appeared to accept these systems, given their short-term success in keeping waste *out of sight*.

This short-termism and narrow temporal framing also reflect a disregard for both past and future generations when envisioning alternative futures. By situating solutions within the logics of the Eurocentric waste management model, participants appeared detached from the real-world implications of these approaches. They failed to consider the lifespan of existing technologies, the environmental and social consequences of the mining required to sustain them, or the limited number of times a garment can be recycled. It is as if participants were puppets through which Eurocentric waste management spoke—or, to adapt Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's words, they were ventriloquising colonial imaginaries.

The *listing of renewable energy, fibre reuse, and responsible recycling* reveals a lack of public understanding of what technological approaches truly entail. By advocating for cutting-edge technology that neither reflects lessons from the past nor considers the needs of future generations, participants dismiss alternatives that fall outside the logics of the Eurocentric waste management model—some of which may be more prominent in the global South periphery, where this model has not yet been fully established.

These tendencies perpetuate the gap between the global North core, legitimating scientific knowledge as the exclusive product of European authority; and the global South periphery, portrayed as fragmented, subordinated, and archaic. It further validates the patronising and coercive modernising rhetoric inherent in the Eurocentric waste management model, and reinforces unequal exchange, a key player in global inequalities (as discussed in chapter one).

Participants in the workshops mirrored on a local level what The OR Foundation's example in Chapter One demonstrates on a global scale: how recycling and dealing with waste once it has been produced, are deeply embedded in the public imagination as solutions.

These imagined solutions also underpin the Extended Producer Responsibility policy-framework (discussed in chapter ONE), that is soon to be extended to textiles in the UK. Indeed, in workshop three, one group argued for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) stating that companies that produce waste should pay tax to local governments for collecting and recycling waste.

The Spells Within Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

EPR is the scheme that provoked the #StopWasteColonialism campaign, and it is due to be implemented for clothing waste in the UK including in the Lancaster District. EPR effectively combines the three spells discussed in this chapter.

Spell ONE "There is No Alternative"

EPR does not allow for alternatives outside the logic of the market; instead, it reinforces the notion that there is no alternative to the market. It suggests that business as usual can continue, provided producers take responsibility for managing waste.

Spell TWO "Consumer Purchase is Our Only Power"

As part of EPR, a tool called Digital Product Passports (DPP) is set to be introduced. This tool will share data on a product's materials and environmental impact (via QR codes, NFC chips, or RFID tags) to assist consumers in making sustainable choices. However, by framing DPP as a form of consumer "empowerment," this approach reinforces a consumption-based "choice" model that shifts responsibility back onto individuals.

Spell THREE "Short-Term Fantasies"

As evidenced by the EPR schemes already implemented in France (see Chapter One), funds collected through EPR are predominantly invested in increasing collection, sorting, reuse, and recycling. However, these measures have not successfully reduced overproduction, and the majority of waste continues to be exported to the Global South periphery (Brooks, 2015; Environmental Audit Committee, 2019; Liberatore, 2022; Skinner, 2019; The OR Foundation, 2023)

This large-scale export-oriented mode of discarding clothes is a reflection of the large-scale export-oriented industrialised production of clothing. <u>It could be said that EPR, as Eurocentric Waste Management scheme perpetuates a mechanism designed to maintain colonial control, extracting surplus value from wasted lives (from cheap nature to racialized labour) characteristic of the dominant modes of production.</u>

As revealed during the Sharing Yarns workshops, the Eurocentric Waste Management model is embedded in local forms of common-sense thinking in Lancaster, where it is perceived as the best possible response to Waste Colonialism. This demonstrates how colonial capitalism positions itself as the provider of solutions, with government support reinforcing these approaches. In doing so, mainstream solutions, shaped by colonial capitalism, influence public common sense and neutralise alternative approaches, ultimately perpetuating the very systems of inequality and exploitation they claim to address.

Concluding Discussion

"*People now just want shiny new clothes all the time*" was a typical dead-end response when participants reflected on the reasons behind the production and consumption of ever-increasing volumes of clothing (Take-Make-Discard). However, while neoliberal

frameworks of individual responsibility (micro-level) work in tandem with the neoliberal economic agenda of transnational monopolies (macro-level), the workshop discussions revealed the presence of alternative values (Figure 33). Contrary to my initial belief, informed by South American scholars who often conceptualise Europe as homogenous, the workshops demonstrated that the Take-Make-Discard logic has not entirely permeated participants' everyday habits or social and historical memories.
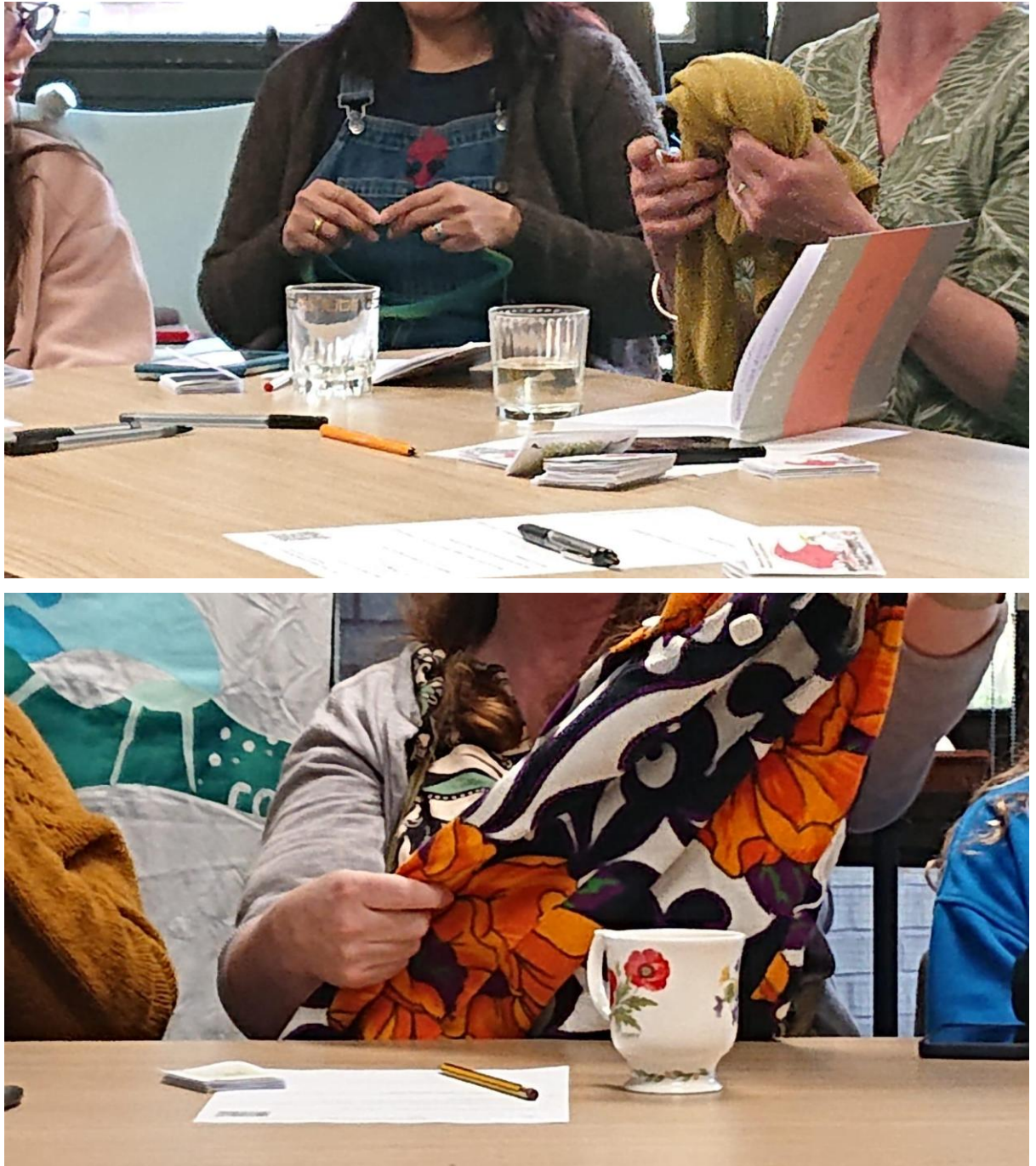

Figure 33 Participants at a Sharing Yarns workshop Three sharing the story of her garment. Photograph by Amy Dickson (2024).

Contradicting the common understanding of people as inherently wasteful or the neoliberal belief that "consumers" drive (over)production, the workshops revealed participants' deep emotional connections to some of their garments—an investment I conceptualise as "enchanted garments." The stories participants shared about these garments were full of joy, such as wearing a borrowed vintage nightdress with Doc Martens to a nightclub or acquiring clothing through non-capitalist means, like rummaging through bins and skips. These enchanted garments connected participants to past and future generations, as well as to a sense of place, exemplified by Andy's second-hand alien T-shirt. Practices outside of the Take-Make-Discard dynamics coexist with overconsumption, whether in the collective imaginary—clothing libraries, shredders, and jumble sales—or in participants' daily lives through their relationships with enchanted garments.

Recognising that colonial capitalism is not universally dominant sheds light on the persistence of anticolonial practices that might serve as tools for reimagining the world otherwise.

When exploring alternatives to the current model of production, wear, and discard—which perpetuates Waste Colonialism—the workshops also uncovered three "spells" that limit imaginaries to business as usual: There is no alternative, consumer voting is the only power, and short-term solutions.

A gap emerged between participants' analysis of the wider system and the proposed "solutions," which remained confined to reproducing Take-Make-Discard logics. Although participants recognised the need for systemic change, their scope for imagining alternatives outside the status quo was limited. Many defaulted to approaches like improved consumer and production practices, perhaps because these solutions are deeply embedded in the collective imagination or due to tensions between possibilities and perceived challenges—such as the social impacts of gender inequality, which were seen as hindering a return to more communal practices of social reproduction.

Initially, I conceived of a single spell to break, but interactions with workshop participants quickly extended this to three, evolving the metaphor into an anticolonial practice of "disenchanting," "freeing," or "liberating" participants from three embedded neoliberal beliefs: (1) that there is no a better world that the one given (drawing on Avery Gordon); (2) that the only change can happen through individualistic consumer practices

(capitalist realism as described by Mark Fisher), and (3) short term fantasies and the western idea of the linear time (inspired by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Walter Benjamin).

It could be argued that the responses of workshop participants are analogous to the case of the #StopWasteColonialism campaign by The OR Foundation (discussed in Chapter 1). Despite an awareness of the systemic problems, imagining alternatives to the Eurocentric Waste Management model remained a challenge.

These "spells" limit our ability to imagine alternatives. As well as obscure the realities of colonial capitalism and its perverse global structures of extraction, production, and discard, which for over 500 years have imposed a global racialised labour force, perpetuating unequal power relations between core and periphery (both within and between countries).

Ultimately, these spells shape and influence popular opinion in favour of the Eurocentric Waste Management Model, while also acting as barriers to nurturing the sociological imagination. They function as decoys, diverting attention away from macro-level structures such as the global economy—where corporations profit from overproduction across the entire supply chain—and colonialism, which remains the historical and ongoing force sustaining unequal exchange and perpetuating Waste Colonialism.

The capitalist logic underpinning the Eurocentric Waste Management Model seeks to obscure colonial colonialism's foundational role in perpetuating systems of unequal exchange and the production of wasted lives as the key feature of the global modes of (over) production. More critically, it aims to conceal the that tools for challenging the existing social order and envisioning a utopian future free from Waste Colonialism have long existed—and continue to exist—in everyday practices, as demonstrated through the Sharing Yarns workshops. These "spells" have played a pivotal role in masking colonialism's influence, shaping common-sense understandings of the global crises, and concealing viable alternatives to the Take-Make-Discard framework. By presenting capitalism—and its corollary, Waste Colonialism—as the only conceivable system for organising the world. The spells elucidate how, through the Eurocentric Waste Management model, multinational corporations—working in coalition with state power— have successfully constrained discussions around waste within scientific, technological, and economic frameworks. By positioning themselves as the legitimate owners of

solutions to the very environmental crises they perpetuate, these actors effectively neutralise, assimilate, and domesticate alternatives to Waste Colonialism. They shape and influence local forms of common-sense thinking and reinforce capitalist realism. In doing so, they co-opt potentially transformative approaches, aligning them with their profit-driven agendas, while simultaneously obstructing organised political action.

Vignette Seven: Two Tables

"You are not going to change the world" I kept telling myself. "I know, I am not naïve" I kept replying "But there is plenty of us", and yes: mending cafes were mushrooming in social media along with tips on how to make/mend/thrift videos and second-hand trends. More academics where writing fancy books and publishing flashy articles. Circular economy became mainstream. Recycling was selling more products than ever. Grants have been distributed for more research and cutting-edge technology.

And yet global environmental burdens from materials extraction, manufacturing and distribution show no signs of abating and social justice for the majority of those involved along the full lifecycle of textiles, seems far from being achieved. The disequilibrium of the global supply and demand of used textiles is worsening. The glut of second-hand clothing swamping global markets is depressing prices for used textiles. Second-hand textiles collection points are closing due high supply in the global north, and exporting textile waste to developing countries is being outlawed. Meanwhile, fibre production has more than doubled in the last 20 years globally and the number of times an average piece of clothing is used has been decreasing drastically. In short, we are in a textile production and recycling crisis, with grave consequences for global climate emergency. What is going on? Is the man with his two set of tables going to appear again?

Chapter Six: Vernacularizing Waste Colonialism: The Zine and the Game

This chapter presents two visual methods/results, the zine and the game, which were developed during the course of the workshops. This meant that the methods changed as workshops progressed, but is ultimately more generative since the workshops were used to improve the methods in an iterative way meaning that methodological innovations became results through the improvement of the self-same methods. As a designer, I have created responses throughout the research process, informed by interactions with participants, to incorporate their ongoing vernacularisation of Waste Colonialism into the materials and methods. These responses formed the foundation for the design of a zine and a game.

These designs are both, an activist practice and an attempt to ensure that the products of the research have a life beyond the bookshelves. They resulted from discussions in workshops and follow up conversations on how the information should be used and disseminated at the **systematic devolution stage.**

The zine came out of the first workshop and it was then applied and improved iteratively across the following three workshops. The game was reinspired by The Critical Crafts project, which uses craft to facilitate conversations about social issues. It prompted me to revisit the original idea of a game I had presented in March 2022 during the event What is Sewing Café Lancaster (SCL) all about? discussed in the previous chapter. Together, we developed the first version of a game during Workshop Four to facilitate discussions on the clothing waste crisis. The Zine and the Game each serve as activist practices and attempts to ensure that the products of this research extend beyond academic bookshelves. They emerged from discussions during workshops and follow-up conversations on how information should be used and disseminated, as detailed in the systematic devolution stage outlined in Chapter 4.

These designs remain in permanent development, with collectives continuing to work on them beyond this MPhil thesis. The zine will become part of a series developed by Morecambe Riso Press, while the game is being collaboratively developed by the Ref/Use Lab, Ishara Game Studio in Lancaster, and Morecambe College. Both projects are grounded in the graphic Take-Make-Discard conceptual framework, with the conceptualisation of Waste Colonialism serving as their baseline.

During the development of this contextual framework and the discussions held in the workshops, I identified inconsistencies in the main literature addressing the conceptualisation of Waste Colonialism. In the following sections, I will address these inconsistencies and explore how the concept can be redefined to unlock its radical potential.

The Zine

In order to provide an object to foment ongoing conversation, I have designed a zine that provides the participants with information about the problematic at hand, while also directing people (through a QR code) to an online form that offer space for adding stories and points to the manifesto for political practice.

The design is based on the graphic Take-Make-Discard conceptual framework with the conceptualization of Waste Colonialism as a baseline.

The first page is an invitation to utopia, with the opening phrase: "*waste hasn't always been a problem and it doesn't always have to be*" (Figure 34), the second and the third present the problem where I aim to bring into mainstream conversations on waste simultaneously address systemic racism and ecocide. Highlighting the entanglements of the social and ecological worlds. Challenging the idea that we're separate from nature and human nature (Figure 35).

Figure 34 Front page of the zine (Frausin, 2024).

Figure 345 Pages two and three of the zine (Frausin, 2024).

The fourth and fifth pages bring wasted lives to the clothing industry as an introduction to the Take-Make Discard framing, starting from Take: material production and extraction, picturing commercial agriculture to grow animal and vegetal fibres represented by sheep and cotton flowers (Figure 36).

The sixth, seventh and eight pages are on making, portraying the lives and their environments rendered as disposable by industries transforming materials into clothing that are quickly discarded through the Eurocentric waste management infrastructure of incineration.

Page nine, ten and eleven continue on discard methods of the Eurocentric waste management model—locally or abroad bringing Stan Virdee point on that anticolonialism should also be a European struggle; and present a critique three of the main features of

Extended Produced Responsibility: the export of waste ending up "somewhere else in the world" and recycling.

Figure 37 Nine, ten and eleven pages continue on discard methods of the Eurocentric waste management model (Frausin, 2024).

Then I wrap up summarizing the linear Take-Make-Discard framing in pages twelfth and thirtieth, to move on the critique of mainstream approaches.
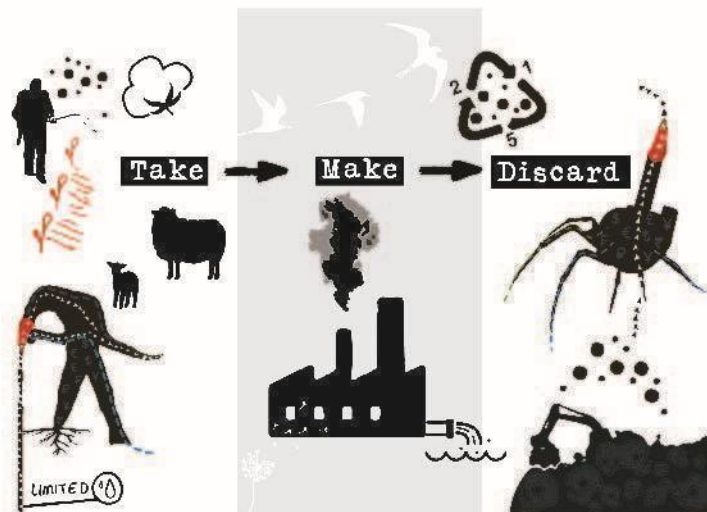
Figure 38 Twelfth and thirtieth pages summarizing the linear Take-Make-Discard framing (Frausin, 2024).

The page fourteenth and fifteenth conclude with the brutality of the global inequalities for the quest of profits and its untenability in a finite planet, addressing systemic racism and ecocide at the core of the problems with the clothing industry, the double fracture I will discuss in chapter 7 (Figure 40).

Figure 39 Fourteenth and fifteenth pages illustrating the brutality of global inequalities in the pursuit of profit and its unsustainability on a finite planet (Frausin, 2024).

From sixteenth to eightieth, I address the spell breaking and make space for utopia, looking for the *revolutionary practices that don't stop the world but are rather a daily part of it* as Avery Gordon would say, by the invitation of do better and turning the zine around.

Figure 40 Sixteenth, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-pages addressing spell-breaking and making space for utopia (Frausin, 2024).

In the other side of the zine, I outline those actions should be taken (Figure 42). I introduce prompts on what could be done and list of ideas collected during the Sharing

Yarns Workshops, giving space to add (Figure 43); and finish with a QR code that directs to a webpage to add more inputs[10], sign a pledge[11] and share ideas (Figure 44).

Figure 41 The other side of the zine outlining actions that should be taken, intertwined across individual, community, and global levels (Frausin, 2024).

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[10] Sharing Yarns online survey
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfYTCN5CrYKvcB14zhpP8s56CnTtLPp3eQTlWCD2eJS3myoLA/viewform?usp=sf_link

[11] You can find the pledge at
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScnrmdiamidRBDxllCOFVEGE1PsDUntIPu3AojR8ZGldvI9pw/viewform?usp=sf_link

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS:

- ☑ I will do my best to care for and mend my clothes, so they last longer.
- ◯ I will check whole supply chain of clothes I buy and consider their end.
- ◯ I will...
- ◯ _____

LOCAL COMMUNITY:

- ◯ I will join local textile groups who focus on awareness and sustainability.
- ◯ I will organise a clothing swap party with my friends.
- ◯ I will promote "themed" swaps amongst friends, colleagues and groups. (Plus size, fancy dress, holidays, Christmas, etc).
- ◯ I will...

GLOBAL ECONOMY:

- ☑ I will reduce my dependency on global corporations and learn about local, independent producers, menders and tailors.
- ◯ I will sign petitions from global campaigns such as: Labour behind the label, war on want, etc.

- ◯ I will write to MPs: Requesting transparency on where clothes are produced and where they go.
- ◯ I will...

Do you have a **YARN** to share? get in touch!

Zine designed and produced by VictoriaFrausin@gmail.com

Figure 42 Prompts on what could be done (Frausin, 2024).

Sharing Yarns

Thank you for following it up. This survey would take about 10 minutes—all questions are optional—and it would be used to inspire others.

Because waste hasn't always been a problem, and it doesn't always have to be. Lets do better, shall we?

victoriafrausin@gmail.com Switch accounts

Not shared

Next   Clear form

The Reason

We are living in times of unprecedented social and environmental crisis, where some lives and the environments that sustain them are treated as disposable.
Soil, water, and air are being polluted from material production and extraction. Toxic waste is indiscriminately discharged. I understand this as having three dimensions:

- TAKE: i.e. extracting oil to make synthetic fibers
- MAKE: i.e precarious working conditions
- DISCARD: i.e clothes made are quickly discarded either by incineration in Cheshire, along seashores, or open landfills somewhere else in the world

This MAKE-TAKE-DISCARD System is **untenable on a finite planet**, BUT we remain "under the spell" that there is no better alternative.
This is a **recent phenomenon** in the UK and **it is not like this everywhere in the world**.

Take-Make-Discard

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Figure 43 Screenshots of the Sharing Yarns online survey (top) and the pledge page (bottom) (Frausin, 2024).

The participants' inputs revealed actions that intersect across individual, community, and global levels, aligning with Alice Mah's conceptualisation of multiscalar activism—where resistance is scaled up and "wide across different networks, as well as scaled down to less visible modes of activism" (Mah, 2023, p. 35). These insights connect broader concerns surrounding clothing waste, climate breakdown, and the global economy. This relates to the concept of sociological imagination, where participants not only recognise the connections between personal experiences (micro-level) and larger social structures (macro-level) but also identify points of intervention. While a full analysis of these inputs extends beyond the scope of this MPhil thesis, what is particularly relevant to my argument is the way in which they demonstrate that capitalist realism has not entirely permeated participants' capacity to imagine alternatives beyond the solutions presented by the Eurocentric Waste Management model.

The above is the latest draft of the zine at the time of writing[12]. Zines were made and improved for every workshop by me (Figure 45), and would be developed further with the interactions with Morecambe Riso Press, participants and collaborators.

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[12] A virtual version of the zine can be found at
https://issuu.com/victoriafrausin/docs/sharing_yarns_august_zine

Figure 44 Left: Process of designing the zine. Right: Folding zines for the workshop on 8 June at Morecambe Library (Frausin, 2024).

The Game

Since workshop one the game was suggested and the first version was presented in workshop four, in order to bring the research into different publics. The game includes the three stages and the draft of the instructions can be found in Appendix 5. The first stage of contextualization, aims to spark sociological imagination by linking a personal garment with the wider structures of power, making evident the vulnerabilities and untenability of the Take-make-Discard system of production and discard, as well as revealing as *gatopardism* the presented solutions framed withing the Eurocentric waste management model.

The second stage of imagination aims to bring anticolonial demands into mainstream conversations that challenge neoliberal frameworks with the hope of give space to new imaginaries, frames, and trajectories.

The third stage of planning aims to build over the brutally reductive modes of production of clothes in the Plantationocene, the planetary networks of oppression such as the predatory debt mechanisms exacerbating unequal exchange, and the *gatopardism* in the superficial approaches of Eurocentric waste management model.

Figure 45 Participants at Workshop Four interacting with the game. Photograph by Shakthi Nataraj (2024).
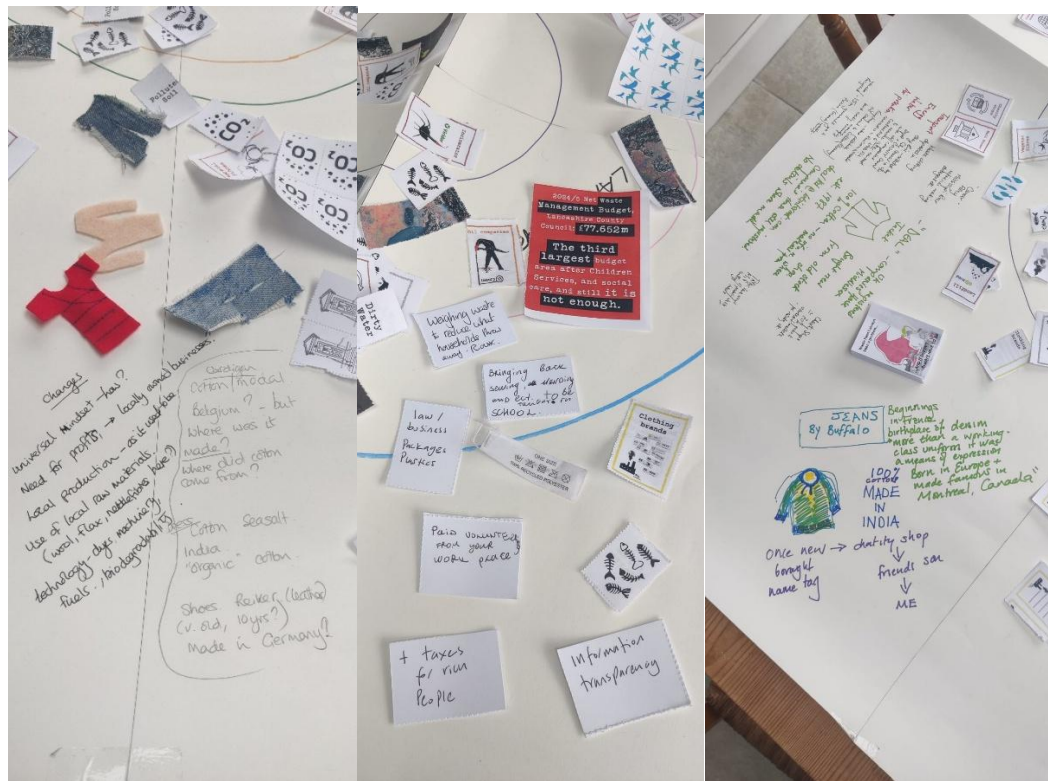
Figure 46 Details of interactions with the game (Frausin 2024).

At the time of writing the Ref/Use Lab and Ishara Press CIC—a Lancaster based game studio—are working on the developing of the game and it would be incorporated in the Lancaster and Morecambe curriculum to include the students on the game design.

The development of the game aims to become a collective exercise of re-writing counternarratives to the colonial capitalist practice of Take-Make-Discard.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored two key visual methods—the zine and the game—that emerged as dynamic tools for vernacularizing Waste Colonialism through participatory action research (PAR). These outputs not only reflect the iterative process of co-creation with participants but also serve as activist practices aimed at extending the impact of this research beyond academic confines. By grounding these designs in the graphic Take-Make-Discard framework and centring the conceptualization of Waste Colonialism, they provide accessible entry points for communities to engage critically with systemic issues of overproduction, colonial legacies, and environmental injustice.

The zine, developed iteratively across four workshops, functions as both an educational resource and a platform for collective storytelling. Its design invites participants into a utopian vision where waste is no longer inevitable while simultaneously critiquing the Eurocentric Waste Management model and exposing the brutality of global inequalities perpetuated by colonial capitalism. Through prompts and interactive elements like QR codes linking to online forms, the zine fosters ongoing dialogue and encourages contributions from diverse voices. This collaborative approach ensures that the zine remains a living document, continually refined through engagement with Morecambe Riso Press, participants, and collaborators.

Similarly, the game represents an innovative attempt to translate complex theoretical concepts into an engaging format that can reach broader audiences. Drawing inspiration from The Critical Crafts project, which uses craft to facilitate conversations about social issues, the game was co-developed during Workshop Four to spark sociological imagination and challenge neoliberal frameworks. Structured around three stages—contextualization, imagination, and planning—the game seeks to reveal the vulnerabilities of the Take-Make-Discard system, promote anticolonial demands, and inspire collective action. At the time of writing, its development continues collaboratively with the Ref/Use Lab, Ishara Game Studio, and students from Lancaster and Morecambe College, underscoring its potential as a pedagogical tool for rewriting counternarratives to colonial capitalist practices.

Both the zine and the game exemplify how methodological innovations became integral results of this research. Their evolution highlights the generative nature of PAR, wherein participant feedback and community involvement shape not only the content but also the form and dissemination strategies of the research outputs. These designs are not static artifacts; they are part of permanent development processes led by collectives committed to ensuring their longevity and relevance beyond the scope of this MPhil thesis.

Ultimately, the zine and the game embody the spirit of systematic devolution—a core principle of PAR—by prioritizing the practical application of knowledge and empowering communities to take ownership of the insights generated. They represent tangible efforts to break the spells of capitalist realism and gatopardism, offering alternative imaginaries rooted in everyday revolutionary practices. In doing so, they contribute to unlocking the radical potential of Waste Colonialism as a concept capable of challenging entrenched systems of power and fostering transformative change.

By bringing the research results outside academia and into activist spaces, these initiatives demonstrate the importance of bridging theory and practice in addressing the intertwined crises of systemic racism, ecocide, and colonial exploitation. As such, they stand as testament to the power of participatory methodologies in nurturing sociological imagination and provoking political action toward a more just and sustainable future

Vignette Eight: Deadlock

One year in and I am struggling. The first frustration was finding out how many studies, concepts and theories that would make the world a better place has been carried out and I had to be at university to learn about them, while mainstream knowledge is framed in obsoleted biases history, ticktock tutorials on quick and easy makeup reaches 504 million views and memes on X ,Y and Z. What is my place in here?

Then a genocide started, with the main powers of the world supporting it and the majority of my contacts either justifying it or looking another way. If we can't agree that a genocide is wrong, how could I convince anyone about waste? do I really want to focus my energy on textile waste? Does it worth it? The bubble busted. My dad used to say that unfortunately, in order to be a medical doctor, people seem to develop a kind of insensibility towards the pain of others, and that's what I am feeling about academia. It doesn't seem to be much relation on what people write and study about with what they actually do, which I learned a while ago being surrounded by academics, but became more evident hearing management scholars off record questioning capitalism, seeing Marxists scholars crossing picket lines and decolonial scholars silent about genocide.

But being affected so deeply doesn't help to move on either, I am learning from my course. I get too passionate and distracted. I find difficult to get into the discipline of writing despite loving the reading, and nothing seem to be enough. I want to draw what I keep learning and making into a fabric banner to tell everyone about it before questioning every single word I have written/drawn breaking through the big confidence cocoon I seem to have been born into. Then I find myself in front on BAE systems holding a "STOP ARMING GENOCIDE" big banner designed and made by myself to protest as it would make any difference outside of making me feel I am doing something. Which I am, but I am not.

The genocide seems to have trumped everything, and cracked any hope I could have though I have done on any intervention on the slow violence imposed on people.

Chapter Seven: Reclaiming Waste Colonialism Through Participatory Action and Creative Practices

Throughout this thesis, I have guided you through my activist journey, reflecting on the tensions within my practice and those arising from navigating academia while maintaining my activist objectives. Drawing on participatory action research (PAR), sharing yarns workshops, and creative outputs such as the zine and the game, this final chapter seeks to redefine Waste Colonialism by putting these into dialogue with the literature to generate a redefinition that moves beyond Eurocentric academic paradigms and mainstream environmental solutions to foreground anticolonial imaginaries and everyday revolutionary practices.

The concept of Waste Colonialism, popularized by scholars like Max Liboiron and organizations like The OR Foundation, has been instrumental in highlighting how waste is exported from the global North to the global South, perpetuating systems of exploitation and inequality. This chapter will discuss critically the limitations of these approaches. For example, while Liboiron's framing of Waste Colonialism as access to land for pollution via pipelines, atmospheric currents, and shipping routes expands the scope beyond material extraction, it perpetuates the semantic drift between the concepts of pollution and waste, that as discussed, limits the envisioning of anticolonial practices of "disenchanting," "freeing," or "liberating" from the spells of capitalist realism, exemplified by the provocative statement used in the Sharing Yarns Workshop and the zine of *waste hasn't always been a problem and it doesn't always have to be* in contrast to *pollution hasn't always been a problem and it doesn't always have to be.*

During the thesis I have also outlined the research process, detailing how a critical analysis of the clothing industry's role in driving global mass extinction—and the scientific and technological racism embedded in mainstream solutions framed within the Eurocentric Waste Management Model, such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)—led me to the concept of Waste Colonialism. This process, in conjunction with work undertaken within communities in Lancaster, revealed how global business elites shape public institutions, universities, state services, and NGOs, influencing common-sense thinking and co-opting radical concepts like Waste Colonialism for their own benefit. Furthermore, I explored how the concept of Waste Colonialism was reframed and

applied within the Take-Make-Discard framework in collaboration with communities in the Lancaster District. Central to this process was the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which not only facilitated the practical application of the concept but also enabled its development through reciprocal interaction with participants.

These efforts produced two key outcomes: firstly, the emergence of activist happenings that continue to be carried out by participants and collaborators, and secondly, a redefinition of the concept of Waste Colonialism itself, aimed at reclaiming the term and unlocking its radical potential. In this chapter, I am going to elaborate a redefinition of the concept of Waste Colonialism, I first present a critical take on mainstream and alternative literature, before bringing this into dialogue with the workshops, zine and game.

Reclaiming Waste Colonialism from Its Co-Option by Neoliberal Fashion

As outlined in the preface, I first encountered the concept of Waste Colonialism through The OR Foundation, which facilitates the #StopWasteColonialism campaign. This campaign aims to lobby the European Union (EU) to address the exacerbation of Waste Colonialism by advocating for a fair share of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funds. The OR Foundation argues that these funds should follow the direction of waste exports to support the development of infrastructure for recycling and improve the collection and management of textile waste in receiving markets(see, for example *What is EPR?*, 2023)

However, at the outset of their position paper, there is little room for justice outside the dominant economic model. The OR Foundation acknowledges the significance of colonial relations as formative of Waste Colonialism (see Appendix 2), but lacks an understanding of neo-colonialism as continuous with neoliberalism as well as any radical anticolonial approach as a potential solution. Their opening statement exemplifies this:

> Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies for textiles must be financially
> relevant, Globally Accountable, and transparent in order to support a Justice-led

transition from a linear to a circular economy through overall waste reduction, environmental regeneration and through dignified economic opportunities via fiber-based recycling, upcycling and decomposition pathways (The OR Foundation , 2023, p. 1).

These demands reflect an effort to integrate solutions into the existing system of production—a classic example of gatopardism, where superficial modifications are made to policies without challenging the status quo. Epistemologically, the campaign reproduces asymmetric relationships between the Global North core, that champions modernisation, technology, and science, and the global South periphery portrayed as lacking agency and dependent on external intervention, naturalizing unequal exchange, discussed in Chapter One. This framing reduces communities like those in Kantamanto market to a subordinate, archaic status, relegating them to residual roles within the global economy. In sum, they reproduce neo-colonial racialised narratives that often frame exploitative practices (in this case the export of second-hand clothing) as "development opportunities"(circular economy, dignified economic opportunities via fibre-based recycling, upcycling) for the Global South periphery, masking the reality of systemic oppression and reinforcing neo-colonial power dynamics. They exacerbate cultural erosion by undermining local textile traditions and crafts in the Global South periphery limiting it to mending, recycling and upcycling the second-hand clothing passed down to them from the Global North core.

Addressing these issues requires not only critiquing neoliberalism but also dismantling the neo-colonial structures it upholds. The most significant problem with The Or approach is that it perpetuates the historical process that started by removing darker bodies from land, communities, and histories (wasted lives); rendering and legitimising them as the natural "second-hand receivers" of the world (epistemological and ontological imperialism). These "second-hand humans" can be understood as "hapless victims to be benevolently disciplined through aid" (Malikki:1995 and Turner;2012 cited in Gille and Lepawsky, 2022).

According to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, anticolonial struggle requires political and religious self-determination, which involves "reclaiming one's own historicity, a decolonisation of imaginaries, and of forms of representation"(Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, loc. 364). None of these elements are addressed within the #StopWasteColonialism

campaign. Instead, the campaign perpetuates what Cusicanqui terms the "ventriloquism of the colonisation of the imagination," (Ibid,) reproducing discourses of heroic saviours of civilisation by urging Europe to distribute part of its EPR funds and adopt its notions of modernisation, science, and engineering.

If, as Rivera Cusicanqui asserts, "the possibility of a profound cultural reform depends on the decolonisation of our gestures and actions" (2010, loc. 547), and as Avery Gordon contends that "real social change requires the gestation, production, and refinement of an imagination well beyond what is usual or socially acceptable" (2004, loc. 170), then the demands of the #StopWasteColonialism campaign, while highlighting issues with clothing waste, push alternatives outside the colonial logic of the market into the shadows. In doing so, they validate the capitalist realism that positions the Eurocentric Waste Management model as the only viable alternative.

Hence, I argue that The OR Foundation has co-opted the radical potential of the concept of Waste Colonialism, embedding it within the logics of the very system it seeks to critique. In the following sections, I aim to unpack this co-option and explore how the concept might be reclaimed to challenge, rather than reinforce, the structures of colonial capitalism.

Critiquing Liboiron's Waste Colonialism

The most widely cited definition of Waste Colonialism and the referenced by The OR Foundation comes from Liboiron in an article called "Waste Colonialism" in the blog Discard Studies—the oldest open-source journal dedicated to waste studies, publishing short pieces from an activist perspective—where they stated that "Waste Colonialism goes beyond the export of waste from colonial centers to the peripheries that make those power centres possible" (See for example Fuller et al., 2022; Kuentz, 2023; Lassana, 2009; Manglou et al., 2022; The OR Foundation , 2023). They argue that Waste Colonialism is "the assumed entitlement to use Land as a sink, no matter where it is, is rooted in colonialism" (Liboiron, 2018).

They identified as the common ground for the different colonialisms the access to territory beyond material extraction or settlement, such as using "Land as a sink for

pollution via pipelines, atmospheric currents, and shipping routes", going further listing non-conventional uses.

By placing access to Land and relations of power at the centre of their conceptualization of Waste Colonialism, and drawing anticolonial struggles and waste studies into dialogue, Liboiron invites us to think and discuss Waste Colonialism beyond materiality and the quest of profit as the only driver. They also bring into the conversation the dichotomy of "good-bad intentions" challenging neoliberal frameworks of individual responsibility and the long-delayed discussion on the effects of mainstream environmentalist approaches that don't challenge colonial legacies, what Malcon Ferdinand, in his 2021 book *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*, calls double critique (2021)[13].

This double critique was addressed at the beginning of in the Sharing Yarns workshops with the phrase: "*We are living in unprecedented social and environmental crises, where some lives and the environments that sustain them are treated as disposable*" (see Figure 21 in Chapter 4) and in the second and third pages of the zine (Figure 40 in chapter 6) where I aim to bring into mainstream conversations on waste simultaneously address systemic racism and ecocide.

Although Liboiron widen the traditional definition of Waste Colonialism that limits it to material waste, two points could be expanded when applied to the case of clothing waste discussed during the Sharing Yarns workshops: firstly, it limits colonialism to access to Land and oversees the legacies of colonialism that facilitates the contemporaneous modalities of waste production, such as uneven exchange, discussed in Chapter One; and secondly, when looking at her later work, they fall into semantic drift with the concepts of pollution and waste.

On the first point, the theory of unequal exchange offers a critical lens to widen the conceptualisation of Waste Colonialism and its implications. By revealing the historical and ongoing role of colonialism in shaping global trade, unequal exchange highlights the structural mechanisms that keep wages and prices artificially low in the Global South,

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[13] Double critique is a concept by the Moroccan storyteller and philosopher Abdelkebir Khatibi (Dabashi and Mignolo, 2015 pp.xxxvi)

enabling the extraction of value by the Global North. This analysis not only exposes the exploitative nature of the global clothing industry but also opens up possibilities for imagining alternative systems based on fair trade and equitable relationships.

The example of The OR Foundation, as introduced earlier in this thesis, illustrates how even well-intentioned initiatives can be limited by market logics. While their campaign against Waste Colonialism raises awareness of the injustices inherent in the global trade of second-hand clothing, it stops short of addressing the colonial dynamics that sustain these inequalities. This underscores the need for a more radical rethinking of waste and its relationship to global capitalism.

In their more recent book *Pollution is Colonialism* (Liboiron, 2021)—from which manuscripts they drawn the "Waste Colonialism" article—waste is not defined and the terms pollution and waste appear to be framed in the same way in both texts, evidencing the no clear-cut distinction between definitions of the concepts of pollution and waste.

The importance of terminology as well as accounts account of the literature on waste in geographical and historical terms of the definitions have been discussed by scholars such as Kate O'Neil's (2019), Sarah Moore (2012), Josh Reno (2018, 2015) and more recently in The Routledge Handbook of Waste Studies edited by Gille and Lepawky (Gille and Lepawsky, 2022), nevertheless, even in the field of "Waste Studies"—that interrogates waste, its methods and cases—is interchangeably referred as Discard Studies—that looks more broadly at systems—, and their two most influential texts for the definition of "waste": Purity and Danger by Mary Douglas (1966) and Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value by Michael Thompson (1979)(Gille and Lepawsky, 2022), refer to dirt and rubbish, respectively, and not waste.

From a legal perspective in systems of regulatory control, terminology and definitions are crucial, recurring in legal disputes (Gourlay, 1992, p. 20; O'Neill, 2019, loc. 823), especially when waste is shipped overseas. In the specific case of waste and pollution, law scholars Ilona Cheyne and Michael Purdue (1995), state that traditionally in the UK approaches to pollution concern to damages already done resulting in reactive pollution laws, adding:

waste is a larger issue in that pollution is always caused by waste, but waste does not always cause pollution. Waste management is therefore concerned not only with the final disposal or dumping of waste but with the whole cycle of waste creation, transport, storage, treatment and recovery in order to prevent polluting harm from coming about. In other words, the 'problem' of waste is the risk that if not appropriately dealt with it will cause pollution (Cheyne and Purdue, 1995, p. 151).

Waste is linked with a vast range of approaches as Sarah Moore, in her highly cited article "Garbage matters: Concepts in new geographies of waste" points out (2012) and waste management strategies therefore include a wide range of policies, from assignment of liability, duty of care, reduction and elimination of wastes, to controls over collection, transport and disposal, as seen in the Waste Hierarchy in Chapter One. And this semantic drift between pollution and waste distracts from questioning capitalist modes of (over)production, resulting in a lack of anticolonial approaches such as Extended Producer Responsibility that misinterpreting waste as pollution, focuses on **diversion** rather than **prevention.** and assumes the production of wasted lives as an unfortunate accident rather than a key feature of colonial capitalism.

Sharing Yarns Workshops: Revealing the Spells of Capitalist Realism

To address this semantic drift, as well as the capitalist realism idea of the spell "that there is no a better world that the one given" In the sharing Yarns workshops and the zine, as an invitation to utopia, I use the opening phrase: "*waste hasn't always been a problem and it doesn't always have to be*" (Figure 35), that if thought in contrast with the word pollution ("pollution hasn't always been a problem and it doesn't always have to be") could shed lights towards anticolonial practices of "disenchanting," "freeing," or "liberating" from the spells of capitalist realism and solutions framed within the Eurocentric Waste Management model.

Through the Sharing Yarns workshops, I introduced participants to the Take-Make-Discard framework, which situates Waste Colonialism within the broader context of capitalist modes of production. This approach allowed us to connect upstream waste

(e.g., petrochemical extraction, agricultural practices) and downstream waste (e.g., incineration, landfilling, recycling) to wasted lives—those rendered disposable by industries extracting surplus value from racialized labour and degraded environments. For instance, participants traced the lifecycle of their garments, revealing how colonial capitalism operates at every stage: from the Cancer Alley communities poisoned by petrochemical plants in the U.S., to garment workers killed in factory collapses in Bangladesh, to self-employed women in Ghana carrying bales of second-hand clothes on their heads.

By widening the conceptualization of Waste Colonialism to include wasted lives alongside material waste along the whole cycle of clothing, we expose the foundational role of colonial capitalism in sustaining global inequalities. These reframing challenges the semantic drift between "pollution" and "waste," which often obscures capitalist modes of overproduction and diverts attention away from prevention toward superficial fixes like recycling. In contrast, our workshops emphasized that waste hasn't always been a problem—and it doesn't have to be. This utopian invitation disrupts the spell of capitalist realism, which insists there is no alternative to the current system.

Liboiron's definition of Waste Colonialism, while ground breaking, risks being co-opted into neoliberal frameworks if it remains narrowly focused on technical solutions or individual responsibility. As argued by Malcom Ferdinand in Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World (2021), any critique of colonialism must engage in a double critique: challenging both the material conditions of exploitation and the ideological narratives that sustain them. Similarly, Satnam Virdee's work underscores the importance of recognizing anti-colonial struggles as inherently European, not confined to former colonies but embedded within the fabric of Europe itself (Virdee, 2023). These perspectives align with the insights generated during the workshops, where participants highlighted local practices of resistance—such as rag-and-bone men, jumble sales, and community mending circles—that challenge the dominant Take-Make-Discard logic.

Moreover, the literature on Discard Studies, including works by Kate O'Neill (2019), Sarah Moore (2012), and Josh Lepawsky (2022), emphasizes the need to interrogate terminology and definitions to avoid reinforcing colonial logics. For example, terms like "waste" are often conflated with "pollution," leading to reactive policies that focus on managing symptoms rather than addressing root causes. Law scholars Ilona

Cheyne and Michael Purdue (1995) argue that waste management should encompass the entire lifecycle of materials, from creation to disposal, to prevent harm. Yet, even this expanded view risks legitimizing the Eurocentric model unless it explicitly incorporates critiques of colonial capitalism and uneven exchange.

My research builds on these insights by proposing a reframed definition of Waste Colonialism: one that integrates material waste, wasted lives, and colonial power relations into a unified framework. This approach resonates with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's call to reactivate historical memory as an anticolonial tool (Cusicanqui, 2010) and Avery Gordon's notion of utopia as existing in the everyday practices that resist domination (Gordon, 2004). By grounding Waste Colonialism in lived experiences and collective storytelling, we can reclaim its radical potential and inspire transformative action.

(Breaking) The Spells of Capitalist Realism: Unmasking Barriers to Transformation

Central to this redefinition are the three spells identified during the workshops: "There is No Alternative," "Consumer Purchasing is Our Only Power," and "Short-Term Fantasies." These spells function as decoys, masking the realities of colonial capitalism and limiting imaginaries to business as usual.

Spell One: "There is No Alternative"

Participants frequently defaulted to individual responsibility and improved consumer practices when envisioning solutions to Waste Colonialism. Suggestions included buying better-quality items, supporting local businesses, or promoting responsible recycling. While well-intentioned, these responses reflect the neoliberal belief that market mechanisms can solve social and environmental crises without challenging the underlying structures of power. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), for example, reinforces this spell by suggesting that business-as-usual can continue if producers manage waste more effectively. Yet, as seen in France's implementation of EPR, such schemes fail to reduce overproduction and instead displace waste to the Global South.

Spell Two: "Consumer Purchasing is the Only Power"

The introduction of tools like Digital Product Passports (DPP) further entrenches the myth that consumers hold significant agency within the system. By framing sustainable consumption as empowerment, DPP shifts responsibility back onto individuals while ignoring the structural forces driving overproduction. Workshop discussions revealed a gap between participants' critiques of systemic issues and their proposed solutions, which often reproduced Take-Make-Discard logics. Breaking this spell requires recognizing that true transformation lies not in individual choices but in collective action and systemic change.

Spell Three: Short-Term Fantasies

Mainstream approaches to waste management, such as recycling and renewable energy, exemplify short-term thinking that neglects the long-term consequences of technological interventions. During the workshops, participants expressed blind faith in recycling despite evidence that it fails to address the root causes of waste. Moreover, these solutions prioritize cutting-edge technologies over lessons from the past or needs of future generations, reinforcing the Eurocentric narrative of progress through innovation. To counteract this spell, we must embrace anticolonial practices that draw on historical memory and imagine futures grounded in justice and sustainability.

The Zine and the Game: Tools for Disenchantment and Liberation

The zine and the game emerged as powerful tools for breaking these spells and fostering sociological imagination. Both designs were developed iteratively through participant feedback, ensuring they remained accessible, engaging, and reflective of diverse perspectives.

The Zine: Designed as an invitation to utopia, the zine provides readers with information about the problems of Waste Colonialism while encouraging them to contribute stories and ideas for political practice. Its pages trace the linear Take-Make-Discard framework, exposing the brutality of global inequalities and critiquing mainstream

approaches like EPR. On the reverse side, the zine prompts readers to envision alternatives, outlining actions at individual, community, and global levels. By incorporating QR codes linking to online forms, the zine becomes a living document, continually enriched by contributions from participants and collaborators. As part of a series developed by Morecambe Riso Press, the zine ensures that the insights generated through this research extend beyond academia into activist spaces.

The Game

Structured around three stages—contextualization, imagination, and planning—the game facilitates conversations about Waste Colonialism by linking personal garments to wider structures of power. It reveals the vulnerabilities of the Take-Make-Discard system, promotes anticolonial demands, and inspires collective action. Currently under development by the Ref/Use Lab, Ishara Game Studio, and students from Lancaster and Morecambe College, the game aims to rewrite counternarratives to colonial capitalist practices. Its collaborative design process underscores the importance of participatory methodologies in nurturing revolutionary imaginaries.

Together, the zine and the game serve as activist practices that bridge theory and praxis. They embody the spirit of systematic devolution, prioritizing the practical application of knowledge and empowering communities to take ownership of the insights generated. By bringing Waste Colonialism into everyday conversations, these tools contribute to dismantling the spells of capitalist realism and imagining futures free from colonial legacies.

Conclusion: Envisioning Alternatives Beyond Take-Make-Discard

Redefining Waste Colonialism necessitates moving beyond critique to envision alternatives that challenge entrenched systems of power and shift away from toxic practices. The workshops revealed the persistence of anticolonial practices coexisting alongside colonial capitalist logics. Participants shared stories of "enchanted garments"—items imbued with joy, memory, and meaning—that connected them to past and future generations. These narratives highlight the possibility of revolutionary practices that do not stop the world but are part of daily life, as Avery Gordon might say.

To unlock the radical potential of Waste Colonialism, we must reclaim wasted lives and environments as central to struggles against ecocide and systemic racism. This involves rejecting gatopardism—the illusion of change without addressing root causes—and embracing transformative visions rooted in relational ethics and care. Examples include community-led initiatives like clothing libraries, mending cafes, and natural dye gardens, which resist the logic of disposability and foster connections across time and space.

In order to do so, the work of Alice Mah is relevant. She argues that although there is no way to move backward in time to unravel toxic injustices, neither to predict the future, to address systematic inequalities requires multiscalar forms of resistance to colonial capitalism, as well as the regeneration of the communities and ecologies that currently depend on it. And looking at the alternatives forms of knowledge that still persist as the Sharing Yarns workshops elucidated it, imagine and create socio-ecological futures that unravel the interlocked crises caused by the unequal nature of the global economy and the uneven international trade.

Ultimately, redefining Waste Colonialism means recognizing that colonial capitalism is not universally dominant. Anticolonial practices already exist and can serve as tools for reimagining the world otherwise. By centring these practices and amplifying marginalized voices, we can build movements capable of confronting the intertwined crises of our era. As this dissertation concludes, I invite readers to join me in breaking the spells of capitalist realism and co-creating futures where waste is no longer inevitable—and neither are the injustices it perpetuates. By putting my research in dialogue with these scholars, I hope I have demonstrated how participatory methodologies and creative practices can expand the boundaries of Waste Colonialism, opening up new pathways toward liberation and justice.

The dominant globalised mainstream clothing system is deeply embedded in colonial capitalism, perpetuating itself through mechanisms such as the Eurocentric Waste Management model and Extended Producer Responsibility. Presented as 'the solution,' these market-led tools are designed to shape public common-sense and neutralise alternative approaches.

Through this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate that there is some hope on the horizon, as capitalist realism has not entirely permeated communities' capacity to imagine alternatives. Through the Sharing Yarns Workshop discussions and follow-up interactions, participants recognised the connections between personal experiences (micro-level) and larger social structures (macro-level). They also identified points of

intervention that intersect across individual, community, and global levels, linking concerns about clothing waste, climate breakdown, and the global economy.

Recognising these connections is crucial for joining up activism between climate and environmental crises. It also underscores the need to advocate for legislative change and work collaboratively to address the root causes of these crises and the Sharing Yarns workshop elucidated that if spaces for sharing stories and critical discussion are created at a grassroots level, new collective imaginaries emerge that challenge the spells of colonial capitalism.

The Appendices

Appendix 1: Screenshot of Instagram posts by The OR Foundation (2025) showing the most frequently found brands on Accra's beaches during the Tag Ur It audits. Accessed in February 2025, via https://www.instagram.com/p/C_bjln3N1q2/?img_index=2.

Appendix 2: What is Waste Colonialism? Screenshot of Instagram posts by The OR Foundation (2025) defining Waste Colonialism. Accessed in February 2025, via https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn6nsD6tCZl/?img_index=1

What Is Waste Colonialism?

Waste colonialism is when a group of people uses waste and pollution to dominate another group of people in their homeland. The term was first recorded in 1989 at the United Nations Environmental Programme Basel Convention when African nations expressed concern about the dumping of hazardous waste by high GDP countries into low GDP countries.

Waste Colonialism is typically used to describe the domination of land for the use of disposal, also referred to as a "sink". This is quite visible in the context of Kantamanto.

For one, Kantamanto occupies over 20 acres of real estate in the center of Accra on land that was owned by indigenous people before being "re-assigned" by the colonial government leaving conflicting claims to the property, claims which make it difficult for them to securely occupy the spaces that they pay for or to improve the market.

These 20 acres of space are occupied by foreign material that disproportionately benefits the Global North. We estimate that the Kantamanto community spends $325Million USD on bales every year, $182M of which was paid to the GN exporters in 2020. The average retailer makes little profit because they must use their resources to repair, wash and upcycle the clothing they receive while also paying sanitation fees to help cover the cost of waste management. While some locally worn clothing and textile may be tailored in Kantamanto, none of the secondhand clothing that is resold in Kantamanto comes from Ghanaian households thereby displacing opportunities for locally generated "waste" to be managed in ways that benefit Ghanaians.

@theorispresent

Two, roughly 40% of the average bale leaves Kantamanto as waste. This material from the Global North dominates formal dumpsites, taking up space that was not allotted for.

This material also dominates settlements like Old Fadama and overruns Accra's coastline to the point that some beaches no longer have visible sand. This waste impacts communities financially, increases the risk of asthma, cholera, malaria and other diseases, changes the relationship that people have with the ecosystem around them and ultimately this waste is used to displace people, blaming communities closest to the disposal sites for the waste and using this pollution generated by the GN to bulldoze their homes and "develop" their land, often for the benefit of foreign people and foreign companies.

@theorispresent

When it comes to the global secondhand clothing trade, the flow of material and the space that this material ultimately occupies clearly follows colonial power dynamics with the Global North as the "sender" and the Global South as the "receiver" of secondhand garments.

In addition to the domination of land, we see waste colonialism as the systematic erasure of the Global South and of Kantamanto's self-image, meaning that Kantamanto is only allowed to exist so far as its purpose can be placed within the context of the dominating culture. This is as true today as it was in 1957 when Ghana became an independent nation, which was not that long ago – you probably know someone who was alive when Ghana was a British colony.

@theorispresent

Under colonial rule, local citizens were required to conform to professional dress codes as defined by the British. Local ingenuity was suppressed in favor of imported ideas and products that financially and socially benefited the colonizer. People were required to swap their local dress for a suit and tie if they wanted to enter certain buildings or to get certain jobs. The British utilized dress codes within schools and churches to demean, and even demonize, indigenous dress. This created an artificial demand for western style clothing.

At first, access to western clothing was restricted. This changed in the 1950s when the rise of mass produced fashion, the normalization of polyester, the mall boom and the introduction of credit cards across the Global North collided to transform clothing from a durable product to a consumable commodity. The secondhand clothing trade was introduced to the GN consumer, marketed as charity, allowing GN citizens to consume more clothing guilt free because there was now an outlet for their excess stuff. Meanwhile, in Ghana, access to secondhand clothing, a cheaper alternative to new western style clothing, allowed more people to signal proximity to power.

@theorispresent

Between 1960 and today, it became difficult for Ghanaian textile manufacturers and designers to compete with the cheap imports of secondhand goods, the GN has continued to exert dominance by setting fashion trends and Ghanaian citizens have subsequently become more dependent on secondhand clothing as a cheap way to subscribe to those trends.

Under Structural Adjustment in the 1980s, international loan money flowed to infrastructure projects focused on moving raw resources out of Ghana, not to infrastructure projects that fostered trade within the country or across the continent. Ghana was forced to privatize their textile industry and employment within Ghana's textile sector declined from a high of 25,000 jobs in 1975 to 5,000 jobs in 2000, the number of large manufacturers declining from sixteen to three. More secondhand clothing began flooding into Ghana because locally made textiles and garments were no longer running at capacity and many of the people who were employed in the local textile industry became secondhand clothing sellers.

@theorispresent

The great acceleration of fast fashion in the 2000's has only intensified the Global North's reliance on Kantamanto as an outlet for excess clothing and in turn the lowering quality of fast fashion leaves Kantamanto retailers dependent on a system where they have to sell higher quantities of a cheaper product to stay out of debt.

Persistent colonial mythology makes it easy for Global North citizens to be willfully ignorant, failing to ask seemingly obvious questions about where their "donations" "end up".

Because it is difficult for people living in receiving countries across the GS to represent themselves and their reality, most people living in the GN have a skewed perception of what life is like in Ghana and across the African continent. There are not hoards of naked people in need of secondhand clothes and there are more seamstresses per capita in Ghana than anywhere in the Global North, all busy sewing custom, made-to-measure, clothing. This clashes with the poverty narrative that the Global North has been fed.

This is aided by the fact that the language around clothing donation and recycling is often misleading, if not completely inaccurate. Respected charities claim that no garment donated to them will end up in a landfill. Municipal bins have recycling symbols on them and brand-managed take-back programs and clean-out kits claim to be part of a recycling program when much of the clothing that enters these programs will be sold on to the global secondhand market.

From our perspective, waste colonialism is becoming more pronounced as it takes on new dimensions. Global North brands are considering setting up sorting facilities in Ghana, facilities that would require importing more secondhand garments to be sorted for the benefit of GN companies seeking cheap feedstock for recycling. And the EU is modeling their EPR policy on the French policy, which would put waste colonialism into law.

Waste colonialism also comes into play in the way Kantamanto is positioned within GN sustainability rhetoric. Kantamanto's contribution to circularity continues to be dismissed in favor of pollution porn while Global North resale economies enjoy generally positive and nuanced coverage. This presents a scenario where GN researchers, journalists and influencers do not treat Kantamanto as a community comprised of skillful individuals and instead rely on Kantamanto as "evidence" of a problem that originates in their own backyard, often spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to travel to Ghana to "document the problem" while doing very little to prioritize the prosperity and agency of the Kantamanto community.

Join us in the fight against waste colonialism by registering at :

StopWasteColonialism.Org

Additional resources:

1. Pollution is Colonialism by Max Liboiron
2. Discardstudies.com
3. GAIA Coalition Open Letter to Ocean Conservancy Regarding the Report 'Stemming the Tide'
4. Economic Diplomacy, Global Waste Trade: The African Perspective since the 20 th Century by Dominic A. Akpan and Bassey Inyang
5. The History of Resale Markets by Liz Ricketts on SlowFactory.earth/ OpenEdu

Appendix 3: Pages 7 and 91 of the Cabinet Meeting Lancashire County Council on Thursday, 8th February, 2024 showing that the 2024/25 Net Waste Management Budget for Lancashire County Council was £77.652 million.

Lancashire
County
Council

Report to the Cabinet
Meeting to be held on Thursday, 8 February 2024

Report of the Executive Director of Resources

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Delivering better services;

2024/25 Budget Report
(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:
Mark Wynn, Tel: 07955 321732, Executive Director of Resources,
mark.wynn@lancashire.gov.uk

Brief Summary

The detailed report (attached as Appendix 'A') sets out the proposed budget for the county council for 2024/25. It also references the medium-term financial position for the following years.

Cabinet is asked to recommend the budget to Full Council at its meeting on 23 February.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to **agree and recommend** to Full Council:

(i) A revenue budget of £1,110.677m for 2024/25, including a council tax requirement of £645.364m (equating to Band D Council Tax of £1,653.29) for 2024/25 reflecting a 4.99% increase including 2% to be used for adult social care (Appendix 'A').

(ii) Policy savings totalling c£15m as detailed in Annex 'C' of Appendix 'A', with consideration given to equality impact assessments and specific consultations that will take place for proposals as required of which the outcome will be reported to future Cabinet meetings.

(iii) The indicative capital programme for 2024/25 of £198.524m (Appendix 'A' and Annex 'E').

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lancashire.gov.uk

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4. Growth, Environment, Transport and Health

Service Area	Net Budget	Net Forecast Outturn	Net Forecast Variance	Net Forecast Variance	Q2 Forecast Variance	Movement from Q2
	£m	£m	£m	%	£m	£m
Waste Management	77.652	78.681	1.029	1.33%	-1.148	2.177
Highways	17.326	14.942	-2.384	-13.76%	-2.773	0.389
Public & Integrated Transport	64.555	73.554	8.999	13.94%	6.816	2.183
Customer Access	3.692	3.247	-0.445	-12.05%	-0.203	-0.242
Total Highways and Transport	**163.224**	**170.424**	**7.200**	**4.41%**	**2.692**	**4.507**
Business Growth	0.473	1.047	0.574	121.50%	0.694	-0.120
Strategic Development	3.390	2.561	-0.829	-24.45%	-0.806	-0.023
LEP Coordination	0.070	0.213	0.143	204.04%	0.142	0.001
Estates	0.663	0.707	0.044	6.60%	0.050	-0.006
ED Skills	0.002	0.015	0.013	522.22%	0.011	0.002
Total Growth and Regeneration	**4.598**	**4.543**	**-0.055**	**-1.20%**	**0.091**	**-0.146**
Environment & Climate	2.208	1.468	-0.740	-33.50%	0.186	-0.926
Planning & Transport	1.003	0.727	-0.277	-27.57%	-0.312	0.036
Total Environment and Planning	**3.211**	**2.195**	**-1.016**	**-31.65%**	**-0.126**	**-0.890**
Public Health & Wellbeing	-72.109	-72.109	0.000	0.00%	0.000	0.000
Health Improvement	57.909	57.909	0.000	0.00%	-0.003	0.003
Health Equity Welfare & Partnerships	5.063	5.063	0.000	0.00%	0.003	-0.003
Health, Safety & Resilience	2.072	1.704	-0.368	-17.75%	-0.368	0.000
Trading Standards & Scientific Services	3.977	4.338	0.361	9.07%	0.473	-0.113
Total Public Health	**-3.087**	**-3.094**	**-0.007**	**-0.23%**	**0.106**	**-0.113**
Total Growth, Environment, Transport & Health	**167.947**	**174.068**	**6.121**	**3.64%**	**2.763**	**3.358**

4.01   The position for the Directorate at Quarter 3 includes the Public Health Service following it's transfer from the Adult Services Directorate.

Appendix 4: 2019 SOEX's proposal to Lancaster City Council.

Proposal to Lancaster City Council (August 2019)

Introduction

SOEX UK proposes the creation of a sustainable long-term revenue stream **Lancaster City Council** by operating a specialist and clothing and shoe collection and recycling initiative on Council managed sites. SOEX UK have worked with Local Authorities and waste companies for over 20 years; our strong customer service and efficient collections qualify us perfectly to provide **Lancaster City Council** an efficient and effective clothing and shoe recycling solution.

Working under TRA Guidelines

The Textile Recycling Association (TRA) is The UK's trade association for collectors, sorters, processors and exporters of used clothing and textiles. Membership of this Association requires signing up to a code of practice, which sets out the professional standards expected of its members, including requirements that are mandatory by law. The majority of non-members are operating outside the law, and their activities should be viewed with suspicion.

Recommended Action Plan

- Work with **Lancaster City Council** to install SOEX bring banks on council land. Identify potential new sites based upon location, suitability, tonnage potential and considerations for local residents.

- Undertake a site survey of **Lancaster City Council** sites, with photographs, provided by SOEX UK.

- Removal of any Rogue Banks from all council sites, replacing with SOEX banks - in line with TRA Code of Practice.

- SOEX UK to manage all aspects of the textile contracts on behalf of **Lancaster City Council** including;

  Recycling contractor control to TRA standards, to cover collections, reporting, rogue removals etc. SOEX UK to monitor sites on an ongoing basis in line with pre agreed KPIs, and to meet with **Lancaster City Council** to discuss, weights, revenue, performance, future initiatives etc.

Separate Banks

- Where possible, SOEX UK provide separate clothing and shoe banks. Providing the public with separate shoe collections increases the overall yield of both clothing and shoes collected, in some cases by more than 10%, when compared against a combined clothing bank. Separate banks also help to ensure that there is less contamination, resulting in a better product.

SOEX

What We Collect

- The SOEX UK banks are suitable for collecting all dry clothing and footwear, accessories such as handbags & belts, underwear scarves and gloves, as well as household textiles such as sheets, blankets, towels & curtains. SOEX UK also accept soft toys, but not carpets, mattresses, pillows and duvets constructed from manmade materials, such as foam or polyester.

Proposed bank design

- Banks can be designed with **Lancaster City Council** livery.
- Clearly marked with **Lancaster City Council** branding, instilling consumer confidence.
- Contact free phone telephone number clearly displayed for public/store inquiries.
- TRA Logo prominently placed.
- Supporting Government Love Your Clothes Initiative.

SOEX UK agree to provide public liability insurance documents, waste carriers licences, and a wide range of risk assessments and method statements on an annual basis. SOEX UK can collate this information on the council's behalf. In addition to this, the operators should agree to provide monthly reporting of weights by site, which should be supplied in an agreed format.

SOEX

Thanks to the unique way we operate, only working with SOEX UK can guarantee the following;

- All SOEX UK operatives fully employed and trained. No agency, contract, or volunteer collectors to service banks.

- Every location serviced <u>at least once a week</u>, with busier sites serviced more frequently, as required.

- SOEX UK banks are well maintained and kept clean and free of fly tipping. This waste is disposed of appropriately at waste bins, contracted by waste management companies – these are located on every driver's route.

- Damaged banks to be repaired or replaced within a pre agreed timeframe.

- All SOEX UK banks refurbished on a rolling basis to ensure banks are free from wear and tear damage.

- **Lancaster City Council** sites will be kept free from unauthorised banks.

- SOEX UK collect all textile waste that is generated on site at every visit.

- **Lancaster City Council** will receive dedicated monthly reports, providing the basis for a revenue stream of **£160 per tonne** collected for **Lancaster City Council.**

SOEX

Who are SOEX UK?

SOEX is the largest clothing re-wear and recycle company in the world, representing an unparalleled global clothing and textile collection, sorting, reuse, recycling and redistribution network that is committed to the very highest standards. SOEX has over 1,300 employees, dedicated to sort, grade and redistribute the 1,000 ones that arrive every day at our facilities worldwide, handling over 1 billion garments every year.

All UK collections are shipped to our plant in Wolfen, which is covers an area of 90,000sq m, a footprint significantly larger than any UK sorting facility, offering real world benefits over such. The 400 tonnes per day that is received from the UK and other European countries is sorted in house to over 350 grades, higher than anywhere else in the world - which means more efficient handling, greater expertise, and crucially significantly lower waste than UK textile operations, Our global leading solutions process more items that would be considered waste in a smaller UK based operation, due to the substantial throughput volumes, and the everything-under-one-roof method of continual sorting till there is nothing left to sort.

The centralisation of unwanted clothing, shoes and textile products to our state-of-the-art European recycling plant offers significant benefits, to the Participating Authorities, to our end customers and to the wider environment, in terms of sustainability, expert handling, the ability to deliver the right products to the right markets, and a continual innovation that represents a viable real world solution to produce secondary uses for product that would certainly be consigned to landfill or incineration, here in the UK.

The goal of the SOEX group is to initiate a closed loop recycling process for clothing which cannot be re-worn. This can only be realised through a significant volume base, far in excess of the volumes collected by most individual companies in the UK alone.

To achieve this, SOEX works with Local Authorities, as well as waste companies and the commercial sector to supply raw reprocessed materials, from clothing and textiles that cannot be used in their original form, to major fashion retail and manufacturing outlets, including H&M, Puma, Levis, Marks and Spencer and many other household name brands, who are committed to working towards closed loop manufacturing. All of these brands are currently producing consumer clothing, made with a percentage recycled fibres, that have been produced in our factories.

Only SOEX are able to guarantee the quality and the massive volumes required by these companies for this process to work.

Whilst the majority of the UK textile collection companies export some, or all, of their collected product to facilities overseas, the clear benefit to **Lancaster City Council** of working with SOEX are;

- The right clothing gets to the right markets. Clothing is sorted, graded and exported from our centralised operation to match our clients' specific orders in over 90 countries worldwide.
- Higher percentage of clothing will be worn again, due to our superior sorting methods.
- Higher percentage of clothing will be re used in a manufacturing closed-loop or recycled into secondary use products, due to our in-house facilities and our relationships in the retail clothing sector.
- Lower carbon footprint derived from locally collated collections using EU 6 Carbon efficient Renault vans.
- Centralised mass handling, with an unprecedented volume base, ensuring greater efficiencies in **all** aspects of the collection, sorting and distribution processes.
- Closed loop recycling for raw materials, cutting global reliance on vital resources, such as fossil fuels and water, supported by global pioneering technologies, such as EU - backed Project Resyntex (an €11 million research project with the core objective to create a new circular economy concept for the textile and chemical industries)
- All these processes result in significantly lower waste generation at source, at the processing plant, as well as in the destination countries.
- A fully sustainable process, investing in the best possible solution for textile reuse, today, tomorrow and into the future.

The SOEX workforce is continuously and highly trained to ensure that the sorting process always ends up supplying the right product to meet market demand. They are supported by a central computer system which controls the entire sorting process and connects to the customers' requests. Each criterion for the sorting process bears its own code – just like every client's order.

SOEX

In this way SOEX ensures that the exact amount and contents ordered by our customers around the world is picked, packaged and delivered, which in turn ensures that only what is required is sent to any of our 90 country destination markets, ensuring sustainability, reducing unwanted textile waste and guaranteeing optimal value for all collected materials.
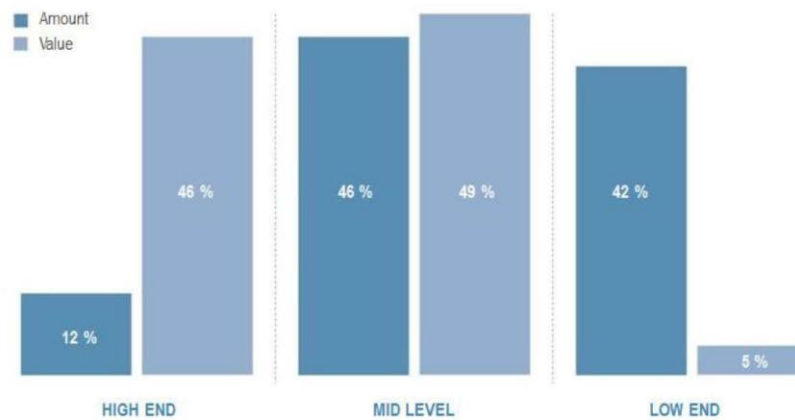

Current Materials Distribution

Re-Use 68%, Re-cycle 30%, Re use as wipers 1%.

Less than 1% of all textile materials are sent for processing to Energy From Waste, with nothing going to landfill.

The above percentages may be subject to change in relation to market demands etc.

SOEX

Legend:
- Amount
- Value

	HIGH END	MID LEVEL	LOW END
Amount	12 %	46 %	42 %
Value	46 %	49 %	5 %

As the world's largest recycling agent for textiles, SOEX delivers high-grade used textiles to over 90 international markets. This is vital in an age where traditional end markets are facing increased competition or threat of high import tariffs from Governments, which effectively make trading conditions unfavourable to UK textile recyclers. Our experience in these countries proves that the market bears a lot of potential for further growth. For example, SOEX is breaking new ground by collecting for rewear and recycling end of life clothing and textiles from traditionally destination only markets, such as South Africa and Kenya.

SOEX operates worldwide, collecting sorting, processing and selling over a billion garments every year. Our unique operating methods, combined with the sheer volumes collected and more outlets than any other organisation of its kind, ensure that SOEX provides the best value for all its partners.

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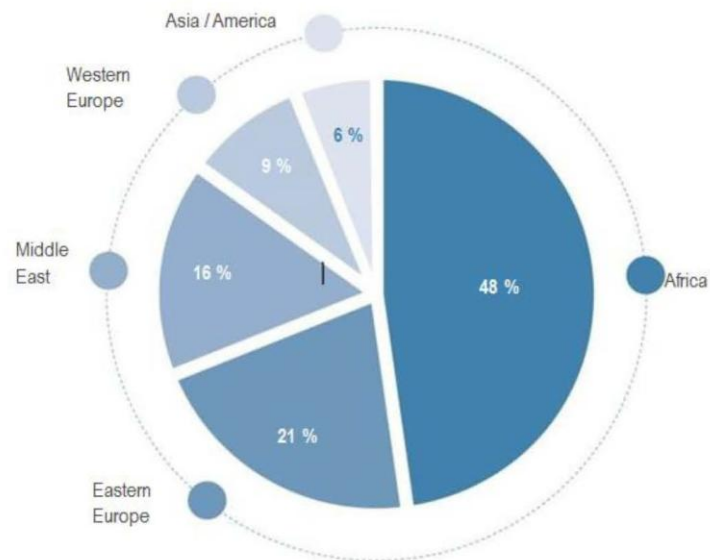
Closed loop textile manufacturing is our ultimate goal, and this can only be achieved through the successful retrieval of essential resources such as cottons, wool, acrylics etc., by providing the resources to divert them from landfills worldwide and reintegrating them into the manufacturing process. For the 11,000 metric tonnes of clothing we receive every year that is not suitable for the rewear markets, our own in house fully computer-controlled recycling unit operates 24 hours a day, every day of the year (with the exception of maintenance).

SOEX

The unit can produce multiple compound materials for the manufacturing industry to suit exact needs and individual specifications. Products include woollens, fibres, cottons, acrylics etc. Pulled fibres can be supplemented by new fibres resulting in a homogenous mixture, custom tailored for manufacturing.

The result is a mixture, custom-tailored to a customer's exact needs – industrial products that, before SOEX, were virtually unthinkable in conventional textile recycling plants.

SOEX

Nothing is wasted in the recycling process. Tons of zips, buttons and rivets are extracted and recycled. The dust that is generated in the process is compacted into briquettes and used in the manufacture of paper and concrete (approx. 825 tonnes of briquettes produced a year). Even the plastic bags the clothes and shoes are collected in are sent for reprocessing.

At the same time, SOEX continually works to uncover new markets and new customers so that the company can process every last bit of used textiles for industrial or preliminary products, always with the goal of recycling 100% of used textiles and, keeping in mind the SOEXs philosophy: ZERO WASTE.

(Our bring banks in Brighton City council)

Appendix 5: Draft of the Sharing Yarns instructions.

Sharing Yarns: Instructions

> *"Waste Hasn't Always Been a Problem and It Doesn't Always Have to Be"*
>
> - Victoria Frausin.

Aim of the game

To imagine a world beyond the social and environmental crises caused by overproduction and waste and get ready to live there. For us here and those far away in the future.

To succeed at the challenge, each group must 1) understand the current model of production, 2) imagine the world you want to live in; and 3) prepare to live in that world.

Advanced level: In this version of the game, the worlds need to interact with each other in the 'Sharing Yarns' section of this workshop.

Three Golden Rules

1. Remember that a better world is possible.
2. Think of yourselves beyond being consumers.
3. Think beyond your lifetime.

Tip 1: Our aim is to break the following harmful spells:

Spell one makes us think "*There is no alternative.*" This is untrue: the current wasteful culture is recent, manmade and requires an economic, social, physical and political infrastructure to survive. We made it, we constantly maintain it, we can change it.

Spell two makes us think that "*consumer voting is our only power*". This is untrue: the idea that people influence the market and economic policies through their purchasing decisions treats them solely as consumers. We are global citizens part of a wider community of families, neighbours, friends and colleagues with the power to generate change.

Spell three makes us think that "*The world ends with us*" This is untrue: We must think beyond our lifetime, for us here, and for those far in the future. Or as a Ghanian belief states "Naturally land belongs to three groups of people, namely, the dead, the living, and the unborn".(Azumah and Noah, 2023)

Set Up:

Familiarize yourself with the world and its elements, represented by the cards on the table. You should also have materials to draw or write that will help you to represent the elements that come to mind and that are not provided.

Your table should have the following contents:

1) We live in ONE finite world (represented in the large piece of paper on the table).
2) Cards:
    a. People: Purple
    b. Production and extraction of materials: Orange
    c. Industry: Yellow
    d. Waste management: Brown
    e. Banks and institutions: Red
    f. Households: Black
    g. Transport Grey
    h. Elements: Various
3) Bag with clothing

4) Zine

The game has four steps:

1. **Contextualization:** familiarise with the current model of overproduction and waste.
2. **Imagination:** imagine a world beyond the crises caused by overproduction and waste.
3. **Preparation**: make a list of what would be needed to make the word possible.
- **Sharing Yarns:** Share your world and the preparation steps with the other groups. Learn about the words by other groups and discuss: how would the worlds fit together?

1. Contextualization: understand the current model of production.

Locate each participant's households in the middle (inside the inner circle if you live in Lancaster, or outside depending on where you live).

> Context
>
> The world is immersed in social and environmental crises caused by waste in its various forms. Some lives and the environments that sustain them are treated as disposable. Recession, food insecurity, genocide and climate change dominate the news. A bunch of guys, that dominate the propaganda get richer by the minute, while convincing you and your loved ones that it is your fault, but can be sorted by changing habits, counting your carbon and the ripple effect.
>
> The third largest expenditure in the county council is waste management—after Children Services, and social care—Yet, there is not money to deal with the amount of waste produced, not even enough personal to work, if someone call sick, the service strugle to run.

Following Victoria's presentation, locate the elements into the system with the cards provided. Is there anything missing? Make a list of use the blank cards provided.

2. Imagination: imagine the world you want to live in.

Discuss among the group the world you want to live in or use the example provided below*

> **Tip 2:** work around the question: what would a social and environmentally just society look like?
>
> Take into consideration the social, economic, political structures and rules required, as well as the kind of people would be capable of and desiring to live in such a society.

Write the key features of that world in a piece of paper.

*Example:

> *In January 2019 in World 59, a city council declared a climate emergency and a coalition of citizens, institutions and businesses understood the impacts of textile waste on people and the environment, especially in poor countries.*

A research project to understand the local waste and recycling dynamics resulted in a big positive campaign and people feel more connected with their clothes. We all become users rather than hectic buyers and feel empowered to mend, proudly showcasing the aesthetics of the used. Laundries promoted a milkman-like delivery service to care for the clothes, and a very well used swap system emerged.

Fashion Fiction World created by Victoria Frausin. March 2021

3. Preparation: prepare to live in that world

Locate the elements of your imagined ideal world, on the piece of paper, using the cards

"You have to practice it with others. You have to prepare. And when you do that long enough, it's no longer refusal anymore. It's just your life…

[Preparation for something else matters because it] "marks the moment when their permission doesn't matter anymore; marks the moment when you'll never be turned, even if they take you back; marks the moment when something else has to be next; marks the moment when the 'not-yet' is already here, because you become unavailable for servitude, back stiff with conviction"

- Avery Gordton (Hawthorn Archive, 184-185).

provided. Think about how they interact with other elements, and implications that they carry.

For example: what are the implications of removing oil pumps and replacing them with renewable energy? It might mean the extraction of the metals and minerals required to make wind turbines, solar power and electric batteries. It might raise the question of where to dispose the nuclear waste from nuclear plants.

Prepare for the implications and consequences you have imagined on the map. You and your group are running away from the untenable Take-Make-Discard dynamic. What is needed? How would you prepare?

What is needed to build the social, economic, political structures and rules required to build a social and environmentally just world? No step is too small. Start from where you are: as residents of Lancaster district and your role within it. (e.g., students, children, residents, employees, employers, carers, etc)

What kind of people would be capable of and desiring to live in such a society?

- **Tip 3:** If you feel stuck and it seems like every step carries negative impacts impossible to overcome, take heart!
- Remember that this untenable Take-make-Discard culture is a recent phenomenon. People have inhabited this planet for millennia and even today, not everyone is immersed in that logic
- Think of practices and/or institutions that have been effective in reducing waste in both the past and present. E.g. jumble sales, clothing libraries, or family garments passed over generations.

- Remember that the current waste management infrastructure is third largest budget area after Children's Services and Social Care in Lancashire County Council. 2024/5 Net Budget £77.652 million, and still, it is not enough. How could that money and labour would be better spent?
- Try pretending you are runaways from the untenable system of Take-Make-Discard. You are escaping to the world you have created and all you have are the elements on your table. How would you relocate them?

Sharing Yarns: Share your world and the preparation steps with the other groups and discuss how the worlds fit together.

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