Old Socks for Start-ups

How Second-Hand Clothes Markets Exemplify Undervalued Entrepreneurship in Poorer Nations and Consumption-Dependent Growth

Research.CP, LLC Issue Paper
IP-2010-001a

December 29, 2010

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The claustrophobic maze of stalls extends in every direction as far as I can see. The piles of old clothes lay strewn on the tables around us, monitored by their entrepreneurial owners trying to peddle wares to potential customers. Loudspeakers from stands everywhere are blaring recordings that repeat the words, "mia tano, mia tano, mia tano," Kiswahili for 500 and indicating the price of clothes at the stand: 500 Tanzanian shillings, about $0.35. Prices are often relative, and the clothes in good condition will cost more, but the goal is to attract you to the stand to take a look. The noise is deafening.

We are standing in a used clothes bazaar in a market in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. On this day, as part of the study-abroad program that my wife and I are leading in the country, we are touring the backstreets and hidden places seldom seen by foreigners. As our students, my wife, and I snake our way through the market, we are surrounded by stall after stall of used clothing items, "mitumba" in Kiswahili, of every variety: pants, sneakers, belts, t-shirts, socks, and more. Many are name brands we know well: Ralph-Lauren, Wrangler, Adidas and others. I look around, my senses stimulatory overloaded, and soon extreme curiosity sets in. Where did all of these clothes come from?

In Dar es Salaam, you can buy more brand new clothes than you would ever use. These clothes come from far-away industrialized countries, including Europe, China, and the U.S., or nearby places in Tanzania. It is fairly easy to find skilled Tanzanian tailors that will make a suit or dress from scratch to fit your dimensions. These days, however, most of the new clothes available in shops are imitations that come directly from Asia. Our Tanzanian guide, Mejah, bluntly calls it "junk." Buttons detach and colors fade after just a few washings. Why spend 10,000 Tanzanian Shillings ($8) for a new shirt that will lose its luster after only a few months?

Faced with this option, many in Tanzania and elsewhere around the world choose to seek higher quality items. These clothes, however, do not come straight from a factory or sewing shop. The "good-quality" clothes come second-hand from Europe and North America, and they are prized possessions. To Tanzanians, they are durable, stylish products that last longer and are affordable. The irony is stark: these clothes are more than likely made in Asia just like the brand new "junk" clothing, maybe even from factories in the same towns. The used clothes, however, arrived in Tanzania after an even longer journey across numerous continents. What systems make this profitable? Why, when I walk through the dusty paths of a rural village in East Africa, am I guaranteed to see a teenager wearing t-shirt with a logo from an American sports team? These questions intrigued me, so I started investigating them.

The Global Market for Cast-Off Clothes

The production and distribution networks for clothing are complex and, as researcher Pietra Ravoli has noted, highly distorted in economics terms. In her book, *The Travels of a T-shirt in the Global Economy*, Ravoli describes the intricate worldwide web and market distortions that bring a piece of clothing to retail stores. Clothing imports, primarily cotton, are cultivated throughout the world, usually supported by domestic agricultural subsidies that alter the cost of production in industrialized countries. These raw inputs are shipped to manufacturing plants, often hundreds or thousands of miles away. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the U.S. was able to capture the market for industrialized production, first in New England and later in southern states. Global trade, increased transit, and rising incomes in the U.S., however, caused manufacturers to seek lower production costs in other parts of the world. In the U.S., we are familiar with the maquiladoras of Mexico, low-cost clothing and textile factories that began in 1964 and expanded after the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Mexican clothing imports, which comprised the largest portion of U.S. imports 10 years ago, have been supplanted by Asian imports, even as U.S. textile and clothing manufacturers fight to protect domestic manufacturing. These conflicting economic and political interests operated for decades under a complicated system of import quotas known as the Multifibre Agreement (MFA).

In 1995, however, the international Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) began dismantling this system over a 10-year period. Since 2005, a global market has emerged with significantly fewer barriers, allowing countries such as China, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia to rapidly gain market share for exports to both U.S. and world clothing markets. According to the World Trade Organization, Asian countries accounted for 52% of the approximately $361 billion global export market in clothing in 2008. Further, in a trend that researcher Tina Mangieri calls "South-South" linkages, these countries increasingly export material inputs and finished products to lesser-industrialized countries, where consumers have less capital and are often neglected by global production chains. For instance, China, which accounted for over 30% of world clothing exports in 2008, has seen its fastest rates of export growth to such areas. This infusion of goods is clearly visible when you walk through a market in sub-Saharan Africa.

At the same time, another sector of the global clothing market, the trade in used and donated clothing, has exploded since 1990. Unlike the supply chain described above, this network operates with many fewer restrictions. No production quotas or duties complicate the import or export of these products, and prices are set according to true market value. At the beginning of this free-market chain are cast-off and unwanted clothes in industrialized countries. Charities, non-profits, and other organizations in the industrialized world collect these donations, selling them to textile recycling plants in North America, Europe, and Asia. The recycling plants sort the clothing, grade it for quality, and bundle it into large bags for shipment via cargo freight to importers in the destination countries (often lesser-industrialized). The importers sell the clothes, for profit, in large bundles that are priced according to the assessed quality. The bundles are distributed through a vast market supply chain to local vendors, being moved by truck, bus, bicycle, car, boat, or foot as available. Finally, the clothes reach the end retailer, who may have a shop, market stall, or simply sell them right on the street. The site of a pile of large used clothes ripe for rummaging is extraordinary, appealing to deal-seekers everywhere. It was a common sight to see persons of all incomes, including foreigners, sifting through the piles for a t-shirt or pair of jeans. Ravoli explains how people across the social strata in Tanzania purchase mitumba, a concept familiar to anyone in the U.S. who regularly peruses Craigslist for used furniture.

While data is sparse regarding the extent of this trade, some have begun to quantify the global market in Second-Hand Clothes, commonly referred to as SHC. Oxfam International estimated in 2005 that the SHC trade makes up only 0.5%, or $1 billion, of an estimated $200 billion global clothing trade. While only a small percentage of global trade, the SHC trade made up over one-quarter (26.3%) of imports to countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2003 according to Oxfam. In 2009, the U.N. reported that Tanzania imported $38 million worth of used clothing, with $10 million of that coming from the U.S. In fact, the largest export of the U.S. to Tanzania has been used clothing for 7 of the past 9 years according to the U.S. International Trade Commission. Tanzania receives about 40% of U.S. SHC exports, followed closely by other sub-Saharan countries.

Anthropologist Karen Tranberg Hansen has noted two important aspects of this trade: it has strong historical precedent and it is not simply driven by economics. Hansen has eloquently described the unique cultural "constructions" that revolve around the SHC trade in her book *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia*. She attributes the extreme growth of SHC markets as much to Zambian desires to become modern and distinctive as to their search for inexpensive clothing. Thus, the description of industrialized countries pushing their unwanted clothes on poor countries is too simplistic. To be sure, most Tanzanians, especially urban Tanzanians, looked sharper than me on any given day. Buying and wearing mitumba does not imply ragged, tattered clothes, a fact reinforced by high-value SHC exports to Japan, where used U.S. clothes sell for astronomical prices.

While markets for these products have existed for decades, scholars have struggled to assess the effects of SHC trade on a country's wealth, income-generating potential and domestic manufacturing. Many commentators have warned that SHC markets depress job growth in domestic textile industries and operate with fewer regulations, allowing for exploitation and corruption. Others have charged that the SHC trade simply globalizes western culture without corresponding income benefits for the recipients. The Oxfam study in 2005, however, found that in Senegal, a severe decline in domestic textiles manufacturing was likely due more to a lack of capital and internationally-enforced Structural Adjustment Policies than imported clothing. Further, the proliferation of cheap, lower-quality Asian clothing imports would likely supplant the domestic markets in the absence of SHC trade. The presence of SHC markets may actually enable citizens of lesser-industrialized countries access to higher-quality, used clothing that promotes opportunities for style and individuality. In Kenya, however, Mangieri describes a more complicated relationship, where the influx of SHC and Asian imports severely affected Kenyan textile production, which has only rebounded by exporting to U.S. and European markets through favorable trade structures. Thus, a broad understanding of the impact of second-hand clothes for African nations is only clear by studying both the economic and sociological consequences of these imports.

For Tanzanians that we spoke with, the choice of mitumba or lower-quality new imports was usually an easy one. Most would prefer a shirt made in Tanzania or a used piece of clothing from Italy over Asian "junk." The most viable solution for a Tanzanian, then, is to buy used goods from industrialized countries. In doing so, they can get higher-quality products at lower cost because foreign companies do not forecast a substantial profit potential in many African (and other) nations.

The market has spoken and that ends the story, right? Well, two ironies exist. First, many of the second-hand goods come from the same producing countries as the new imports. The second-hand clothes on the streets of Dar es Salaam were likely manufactured in, say, China, Turkey, Bangladesh, or Vietnam, shipped around half of the world to North America or Europe, worn for several years, and then shipped around the other half of the world to Africa to be used again. Even more, trade agreements, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) originally signed in 2000, have increased exports from lesser-industrialized to industrialized nations, only to have some fraction of those clothes return to their creators in the form of SHC. Second, the transport of these clothes around the world perpetuates fossil fuel consumption that contributes to human-induced climate change, the consequences of which are predicted to disproportionately affect lesser-industrialized countries. I find it laudable that clothes of the industrialized world are recycled, but the resultant benefits do not account for the costs of resources consumed through global transit. Given Tanzania's high unemployment rate (even higher among youth and urban residents), does it not make more sense to stimulate job growth within domestic manufacturing industries such as textiles? How is it more profitable (not to mention efficient) to ship clothes around the world twice, rather than pay your neighbor to make something from scratch? While the arguments regarding specialization, labor costs, and productivity are relevant, to be sure, in the final assessment of the long-term viability of the system, they simply don't make sense. A more holistic assessment, however, requires an examination of the broad set of market structures, social preferences, and historical precedents that shaped the Tanzanian SHC markets of today.

The Collapse of Tanzanian Industries: Internationally-Induced or Home-Grown?
Before blaming the evils of global competition and second-hand clothes for the collapse of the Tanzanian manufacturing industry, some perspective is needed. Did these international influences solely stimulate the collapse of domestic clothing production in Tanzania?

Tanzania became a sovereign nation in 1964, after the two newly independent states of mainland Tanganyika and the island of Zanzibar merged. By 1967, the Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerre, became distressed by the limited benefits that Tanzanians received from foreign investment. Nyerre was a deep social thinker who sought a new direction for burgeoning African republics. His core philosophy, the creation of an "African socialism" built around the communal experiences of African citizens, attempted to forge a new path for Tanzanians through governmental and economic structures that spurred growth from within. Domestic manufacturing industries were nationalized under large state-run ministries in order to keep profits within the country. At the same time, Nyerre instituted widespread efforts to build basic public education capabilities, making education free, in principle, to all Tanzanians. In this way, a community would be built around African social values of community, equitably-distributed profits, and social welfare. The vision continued with implementation of the *ujamaa* program in 1972. The *ujamaa* program, which roughly translates to "village-ization," enacted widespread social upheaval in order to promote village-based communal living. In principle, all citizens contributed equally and reaped equal benefits from agricultural production. Communal rural living that promoted social values was favored over industrial development, urbanization, and technological growth. Tanzanians were uprooted, voluntarily at first but forcefully thereafter, and moved throughout the country to newly-formed villages far from their strong family and social networks.

Even though many credit *ujamaa* policies with creating a peaceful country, by most accounts the socialist program was an economic disaster. Tanzania slipped into a massive recession through the late 1970s and early 1980s, only emerging a decade later. Manufacturing and agricultural industries, including clothing, textiles, and cotton production, suffered from lack of capital investment and corruption. While Tanzanian production was able to support domestic demand for most goods in the 1960s and 1970s, by 1985 production was far below demand. The World Bank found that textile manufacturing factories could not function due to frequent power interruptions, material input shortages, and ineffective plant locations. Moreover, cotton production within the country was highly variable and subject to large inefficiencies.

Thus, at the advent of global free trade agendas in the 1990s, Tanzania's domestic textile industry was already crippled. Little investment, bloated bureaucracies, and rampant corruption prepared Tanzania for an explosion of clothing imports. After the retirement of Nyerre in 1985, Tanzanian leaders ended the most disastrous socialist policies and opened the doors of the country to international investment and donor aid. It seemed as if policies seeking to build from within were wholly unable to maintain minimal levels of economic growth necessary to keep pace with a rapidly-expanding population. An influx of SHC, spurred by forced economic liberalization, found pent-up demand exacerbated by inefficient domestic manufacturing capabilities. Since 2000, some gains in manufacturing employment have been visible, spurred by investment related to favorable trade agreements such as AGOA, but the sector's contribution to the overall economy remains small and the investments needed to rebuild it seem unlikely.

Given this track-record of macroeconomic and social policies, it is hard to solely blame SHC markets or Asian manufacturing capacity for the demise of Tanzanian textiles. The free-wheeling nature of the new markets has allowed many small entrepreneurs entry into a formally bureaucratic system. These gains, however, should not prevent us from questioning whether SHC markets currently inhibit growth in domestic industries when many countries such as Tanzania now have renewed investment and more globally-oriented policies. Furthermore, we must reexamine the implications of growth and market structure in industries such as textiles in an era of supposedly heightened consciousness regarding the consequences of global economic systems founded upon cheap fossil fuel transportation. Even as populations of industrialized countries are demanding a return to locally-based systems of food, energy, and products, global trade regimes perpetuate policies that fail to incorporate the true environmental costs of transactions, while reserving higher-quality goods for wealthy countries and relegating second-hand items as the most viable economic option for the rest or the world.

More than Just Clothes

In traveling all over Tanzania during our 6 months, we made good friends with people everywhere and became indebted to those who helped us in our work. One of our favorites was a taxi driver in Dar es Salaam named Juma. Juma does well for himself. He drives a spiffy white sedan with a nice interior and power windows. He was always looking good with sharp clothes, some bling on the fingers, and hip Zanzibari sandals. One day, we were driving in Dar es Salaam, when I looked down and saw an iPhone sitting by the parking brake. I was floored. I said, "Juma, you have an iPhone. I'm impressed!"

Juma laughed and said, "No, no, not real. It's Chinese."

"Oh, OK. Well does it work well?" I asked.

He wavered his hand and said, "So, so. Sometimes it doesn't work well."

I looked over the imitation closely and noticed the detail. The icons looked fairly similar, and it even had the Apple logo on the back. A few swipes of the finger across the screen, though, and I could tell the difference. It was slow. A fingernail tap on the front revealed plastic, not glass. I asked Juma how much an imitation iPhone cost in Tanzania.

He thought for a second and responded, "Oh, maybe 500,000 Tanzanian Shillings." That's about USD$400. For an imitation, I was floored.

"What about a real iPhone here in Tanzania?"

"Oh, very expensive," Juma responded with a longing belayed by a sigh. "I don't really know. Maybe 900,000 Tanzanian Shillings?"

"Wow," I said in amazement. "In the U.S. or Europe, you can get a real one for maybe $100 or $200, if you sign up with a company."

Juma's jaw dropped. "Erik, friend. You have to help me out!" he exclaimed.

"Well, it's more complicated than that," which was my way of avoiding trying to explain how a phone from the U.S. would only work with one company and network. Tanzanians do not have to worry about that. Chinese producers of iPhone imposters believe that they know their market and design for it. The phones take SIM cards from any provider straight from a shop, including voice and potentially data coverage. Even if Tanzanians benefit from this interoperability, they are not necessarily happy about the paucity and expense of quality products. Many seem especially irritated that, despite it being a supposedly free market, the majority of available goods are poorly manufactured imitations.

These sorts of low-quality products are pervasive in the market stalls and roadside stands throughout sub-Saharan Africa. On one occasion, we were trying to find a quality water bottle to give to a friend as a gift, but after a fruitless search in even higher-end stores in Arusha, we had to settle on giving him my own Nalgene bottle that was far better quality. Despite the opening of markets all over the world for consumer goods, manufacturers are not necessarily supplying most of the world with *good* products. Market demand is not proven, so products are not designed or supplied to consumers in lesser-industrialized countries.

There is also a significant cost to environmental systems in supplying low- and high-quality consumer products throughout the world: shipping. The trade in cargo shipping for manufactured products, the circulatory system for the global economy, is by all accounts enormous. Freight moves through various combinations of air, water, and land on a long journey dictated by supply chains and delivery schedules. Most freight moves by ship, truck, and train en route from the production facility to the end-user. The arteries of shipping, overseas cargo vessels, transport enormous amounts of freight but use a relatively small 2 percent of total global fossil fuels. In the process, however, these vessels burn the lowest grade fuel and contribute significantly to air pollution, especially in near-shore areas where ship traffic is highest. A host of environmental organizations recite staggering statistics about the contributions of various pollutants, especially sulfur oxides, by such ships in comparison to cars and trucks. Land-based transit, most often diesel trucks, cross the landscape to deliver their small quantities of items to retailers and end users. In countries throughout the world, such large trucks attain poor fuel efficiency and emit harmful particulates, with the most noxious of emissions from old trucks in lesser-industrialized countries. Air transit makes up a relatively small percentage of overall cargo shipping, but expends the largest percentage of resources in the process.

As concerns for the environmental costs of shipping have increased, the U.S. EPA has taken action to reduce the impact of localized pollution on U.S. port cities. Since 2006, it has worked with the U.N. International Maritime Organization (IMO) to develop emissions models for vessels depending upon freight, while also proposing mandates for lower sulfur fuels that reduce air pollutant emissions within 200 nautical miles of U.S. ports. While this information is good news for U.S. cities, similar regulations do not exist in most parts of the world. Debates on cleaning air emissions from cargo shipping without addressing fossil fuel consumption are reminiscent of earlier efforts to regulate pollutants from diesel and combustion engines without fully addressing car and truck fuel efficiency standards. Further, the true costs of this transport system to society, including pollution, environmental degradation, and the consequences of climate change, alter consumer habits and degrade the cost-effectiveness of localized production.

Some in the U.S. have begun to question the logic of these far-reaching supply lines. This is perhaps best represented by the burgeoning local food movement. Michael Pollan, the movement's foremost public persona, recently described in the *New York Times Review of Books* how "[an] important impetus for the [food] movement, or at least its locavore wing—is the desire to get 'beyond the barcode'—to create new economic and social structures outside of the mainstream consumer economy. Though not always articulated in these terms, the local food movement wants to decentralize the global economy, if not secede from it altogether." Even as citizens in industrialized countries espouse about the values of living locally, walking through a Wal-Mart in the U.S. or a local market in East Africa belies how decentralization from a global economy is, at best, a monumental task that does not stop at country borders.

Driving Economic Growth from the Bottom

This critique of the SHC trade does not lie with criticizing someone for wearing stylish clothes attained at affordable prices. Moreover, the arguments against market practices that favor industrialized countries have been fought for hundreds of years, including the abolition of slavery, workers' rights, workforce protections for women and children, and criticism of global economic policies. In each instance, the trade system has responded to the criticisms by slowly incorporating new rules into the current system. In view of today's pending challenges, we must fundamentally examine the mechanisms that make these systems attractive, notably undervalued natural resources that facilitate global transport, perpetuate pollution, and enable mass production to the detriment of localized economies.

In this economic age, have we advanced past the point where a country can supply its needs locally? The debates over monetary policy that promotes globalization have raged since Structural Adjustment Programs attempted to open markets in lesser-industrialized countries in exchange for grants and loans. In many cases, the nascent and inefficient domestic industries were not prepared for competition from goods produced in leaner, industrialized countries for a host of reasons. Many economists argue that the destruction of impediments such as state bureaucracies and import quotas have created new opportunities for thousands of creative entrepreneurs throughout the world.

Even as these macroeconomic debates abound, most scholars tout the fundamental role of one concept in economic growth: entrepreneurship. Ambitious individuals who start new businesses have the capability to generate wealth where none previously existed through their inputs of labor, expanding the marketplace and generating further wealth. Not everyone is a natural entrepreneur, and within the set of those who are, there are many different colors and flavors.

In Tanzania, there are lots of entrepreneurs. Already possessing entrepreneurial spirit, what many Tanzanians need is more access to capital and educational opportunities. Only recently could a Tanzanian with moderate income open a bank account, and access to credit is still incredibly expensive. Even so, we saw all around us how ambitious and driven many Tanzanians were to earn a living, selling small consumer goods, phone cards, food, and just about anything else. The markets for small goods were magnificent.

To economists, second-hand clothes seem ideal for small entrepreneurs: cast-off goods from industrialized countries are recycled in lesser-industrialized countries, fueling commerce through activities that require minimal access to capital. Persons traditionally under-represented in small businesses, especially women, can start earning money, which can have tremendous positive effects on social structures. What does it take, though, to get those clothes to the Tanzanian market? What assumptions have been left out of the calculations, namely the pending costs of environmental degradation and pollution that result from the complex supply chain of clothes spanning multiple continents? Moreover, would Tanzanian entrepreneurs see this as the best system under which to expend their energies? Seeing the ends of these supply chains, I wondered if experts in industrialized countries were not significantly undervaluing the abilities of Tanzanian entrepreneurs. While entrepreneurship is often hailed as a path to wealth, bartering small imported trinkets is hardly the glorious vision trumpeted by experts in industrialized nations or the global voices of poverty alleviation.

A Call to Recognize Entrepreneurial Capabilities

Perhaps it is elitist to believe that all entrepreneurial drive should be funneled into grand, creative ideas that develop products and services to improve lifestyles in an environmentally-friendly way. After all, necessity dictates that money must be made. It is just as elitist, however, to believe that market specialization strictly reserves these creative entrepreneurial activities for educated residents of industrialized countries dominated by hip urban environments. Some have begun to address this question. Concepts such as social entrepreneurship and reverse innovation seek to enable entrepreneurs in lesser-industrialized countries with skills and resources to carry out their ideas, which are tailored to the problems and market opportunities around them. Global economic systems, as well as development programs, must emphasize such concepts if they truly strive to incorporate the potential ingenuity locked within these countries.

These entrepreneurs, and the prospects of halting global climate change, face an uphill climb if global economic structures continue to emphasize supply chains that bring goods from far away factories over local capabilities. The mobilization of natural resources, which combines with labor inputs to spur new markets and wealth generation, has been a consistent driver of growth within current economic paradigms. The traditional path has been to extract more, use labor to turn it into products, and build upon that wealth with new, "creative," ideas. This prosperity, however, is founded upon delaying the costs of resource consumption for later generations. Every generation finds itself at a crossroads of some sort, faced with a choice to continue the status quo or break into a new paradigm. We face serious decisions about transitioning to societies that reduce consumption, reform economic structures, implement regulatory regimes that incorporate the costs of pollution, and ponder the role of humans in ecological maintenance. Even if we in the U.S. or Europe try to refashion our economies to be more streamlined, international institutions and economic regimes have laid the groundwork for a whole new series of industrializing countries to take up the mantle of consumption-based growth at ever larger levels. It is certainly not the fault of any businessperson from Tanzania, Mali, Bolivia, or Myanmar, seeking ways to make money using what is available. After seeing the ambition and ingenuity around me in Tanzania, however, it seems short-sighted to relegate the flurry entrepreneurial activity in these countries to selling cast-off items. Are experts in industrialized countries sure enough in their solutions to the complex problem set of population growth, resource consumption, global climate change, and economic growth as to promote these solutions to the rest of the world's population? Moreover, the consequences of being wrong, namely climatic change, will likely affect lesser-industrialized countries that lack the resources to mitigate floods, droughts, and other disasters. Perhaps the solutions can come from entrepreneurs in lesser-industrialized countries. Or, perhaps they already have and no one is listening.

I remain dismayed by a ludicrous global system that creates a less-expensive end product by shipping it almost 25,000 miles around the circumference of the Earth during its lifetime rather than have having it produced by a neighbor with sewing talent but no access to capital. If, however, someone willingly chooses what is fashionable or less expensive, even if it fuels an unsustainable global culture of consumption, then who am I to say no. So long as the global infrastructures for shipping, manufacturing, and energy usage perpetuate such production and distribution networks as affordable, consumers will choose the best products at the lowest prices. I do not believe this market structure to be sustainable, but it will likely sustain for some time to come, allowing people everywhere access to temporary benefits without incorporating the long-term consequences of pollution and environmental degradation. Our students, after all, enthusiastically rummaged through the mitumba piles as much as anybody, benefiting from a second-chance to buy the clothes they regularly saw at home, but this time a bit cheaper. Thinking back to the chaos of the bazaar stalls in Dar es Salaam, I now realize that those piles of clothes represent far more than potential deals or examples of small entrepreneurial activity. They are a window into a dizzying set of assumptions that drive our global economic order, and a prescient call to question the long-term viability of our society.