

Building Workers' Power Against Globally Mobile Capital
Case Studies from the Transnational Garment Sector

Ashok Kumar

St. Johns College, Oxford University
School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford

Supervisors

Professor Linda McDowell
Professor Craig Jeffrey

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Abstract

Garment sector trade unions have proved largely powerless to combat hypermobile transnational capital's systematic extraction of surplus value from the newly industrialized Global South. Optimized conditions for accumulation coupled with the 2005 phase-out of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) have meant a radical geographic reconfiguration of the globalised garment industry heavily in favour of capital over labour.

The thesis approaches the global garment sector from multiple vantage points across the world with the goal of uncovering the obstacles to workers' organisation, examine workers' strategies of resistance, and analyse the changing composition of labour and capital within the clothing commodity chain. The thesis highlights five distinct but interconnected case studies including a transnational workers campaign from a garment factory in Honduras; a history and present-day feasibility of establishing a transnational collective bargaining from El Salvador to Turkey to Cambodia; the prospects for a countermovement in the organizing strategies at the bottom of the clothing commodity and supply chain in Bangalore; the growth of a 'full package' denim manufacturer in changing the relationship between 'buyers' and 'suppliers' on the outskirts of Bangalore; and finally a continuation of this analysis the case of a strike at a monopoly footwear supplier in China.

The central research question is: *How do workers build power and establish workers' rights in the globally hypermobile garment sector?* Ultimately, what is demonstrated within this thesis is that the actions of garment workers shaped and circumscribed the actions of capital in the sector, and as capital transformed new landscapes for accumulation new vistas for opposition begin to emerge.

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The need of a constant expanding market... chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe...All old-established national industries ...are dislodged by new industries...that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes...The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all...nations into civilization... It compels all nations on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeoisie mode of production; It compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst... In one world, it creates a world after its own image.

- Marx & Engels, 1848

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In September of 2000, as activists laid siege to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank summit in Prague, South African finance minister Trevor Manuel pondered the relevance of protesting against a system that felt so inevitable, 'I know what they are against but have no sense of what they are for' (Kingsnorth 2012). The anti-sweatshop movement was in full swing, part of a vibrant tapestry of anti-capitalist social movements at the end of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century that became known as the 'global justice movement.'

Unlike the perceived indecisiveness of much of the anti-capitalist movement at the time, the anti-sweatshop movement remained steadfast in its demands. Issues such as liveable wages, autonomous worker organization, and collective bargaining remained at the forefront. The problem was not that workers and activists did not know what to fight for – it was how to get it. Achieving these fundamental rights becomes a seemingly insurmountable hurdle under conditions of 'globalised' hypermobile capital. In the garment sector structural hurdles such as vertically disintegration, subcontracted manufacturing, just-in-time production practices, as well as the 2005 end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) compounded the difficulties of establishing workers' rights in the sector.

The establishment of the MFA in 1974 had helped regulate the acceleration of globalisation in the garment, textile and footwear sector.

Unions in the Global North attempted to stem the tide of liberalization in the garment sector by pushing for the 30-year MFA, which limited production by establishing quota limits from each country. Yet the relocation of production from the unionised factories of the Global North to the sweatshops of the Global South continued. Between 1990 and the MFA phase-out at the end of 2004 the number of workers employed in the textile and clothing manufacturing sectors in the US contracted by 60% (Moran 2010). Steadily, over time, as the industry fell in the Global North, employment and trade unions within the sector declined apace.

As more poorly regulated garment factories of the Global South began to produce greater amounts of clothing destined for the Global North, health and safety risks began to increase. In 2013 a garment factory collapsed in the Savar district of Dhaka, Bangladesh killing more than 1,100 workers and becoming one of the deadliest industrial failures in history. The factory collapse followed years of uninterrupted deadly factory fires in the garment sector in Bangladesh and Pakistan. These tragedies highlight the dynamics found in some parts of the global clothing sector, specifically in South Asia, an industry that has come to represent one of the world's most dangerous, exploitative, and profitable sectors of manufacturing. Thus, it is both academically and practically critical to analyse the history and dynamics of power and exploitation within the global garment sector, a central goal of this thesis, in order to understand and remediate the chronic problems that plague the sector today.

In the post-MFA world the capital-light, low-value, and vertically disintegrated clothing commodity chain represents one of the world's most globalised industries. Accordingly, research that analyses common and disparate phenomenon through a global approach is needed to understand the efficacy of workers' strategies. This dissertation examines the sector from multiple case studies that are held together by a shared theme and a common research question. The central question of the thesis is: *How do workers build power and establish workers' rights in the globally hypermobile garment sector?* By analysing history, present-day local efforts, as well as transnational campaigns the research reviews contemporary manifestations of workers' struggle to develop a detailed understanding of the political economy of the garment sector and the position of workers vis-à-vis global brands and their direct employers. Research was conducted in the field in South India, as well as interviews with garment workers and activists in Cambodia, Turkey, Honduras, China, and the U.S., as well as observing as a participant the formation and campaigns of the International Union League for Brand Responsibility ('League') with member unions across the globe. Ultimately, through this research I aim to construct a fuller and better understanding of how contemporary garment workers can build power in a globalised garment sector.

The research is founded on the principle that the underlying structural characteristic of capitalism is the creation of antagonism between the forces of labour and the interests of capital. These two poles have been locked in a historical battle since the beginning of the industrial era, which systematically

thrust capital to overpower labour. This dynamic is further exacerbated under what has become known as 'globalisation', which has become an all-encompassing term for increases in global cultural, economic and technological integration. This conflict between labour and capital reveals a fundamental question of how these forces organize around their interests for the purposes of realizing them.

The primary structural advantage of global capital over labour is its ability to organize, aggregating, and mobilizing around its common interests to outrun and exploit labour. Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels (1848) argued that as capital expanded across the globe, so too a global proletariat would be generated, one that ultimately would lead to the dismantling of capitalism. In other words, Marx and Engels maintained that capitalism produced its own 'gravediggers.' While it is true that capitalism creates workers, much of the evidence around the world suggests that workers are actually interested to pursuing individual rather than collective interests. In fact, the rules of the game are such that workers will often find it in their interests to pursue individual strategies of self-protection rather than collective and organizational strategies since the labour process has been shaped to fragment class solidarity (Burawoy 1979). In other words, creating and sustaining a union is something that perhaps should be taken as unusual in capitalism (Chibber 2011). Capital's advantages over labour are further exacerbated in the labour-intensive vertically disintegrated garment sector since investment, liability, and labour skill remain relatively low. This explains why despite two decades of anti-

sweatshop campaigning across the world, the wages in the sector have fallen, conditions have worsened, and strength of workers in the sector are at a historic nadir (Greven 2008; ILO 2000; AFL-CIO 2013; Ballinger 2009). It would appear that garment capital has succeeded in undermining the power of workers.

As Thomas Greven (2008, 34) states, 'transnationalisation has become necessary because labour's bargaining power and political leverage have been eroding at the firm and national levels' because the liberalization of trade and capital transfers has allowed TNCs to 'whipsaw' different workplaces and nation-states by threatening or executing their 'exit option.' It is within this context that the focus of my dissertation is placed squarely on worker-led initiatives to mobilise workers in factories located in different countries producing for some of the same brands. For example, the case study in chapter 5 looks at a coordinated transnational effort to establish workers' rights. Led by the League, the campaign for a Jobbers' Agreement grew out of the struggle of workers in Honduras in 2008-2009 (the focus of the first case study in chapter 4), and has since spread to nearly a dozen countries. The campaign breaks with the almost entirely unsuccessful attempts of the past twenty years to establish workers' rights in the garment sector. It is from this point that the cases take a more in-depth look at individual struggles in India, in chapters 6 and 7, and China, in chapter 8.

In the thesis I share the optimism of Ronaldo Munck (2008, 220) who asks ‘what if the labour movement is entering a new cycle of activism and militancy, precisely through the contestation of neoliberal globalisation?’ and continues, ‘Is it inconceivable that a global contest between labour and capital might now emerge as Marx predicted?’ Indeed, this question lays the foundation for my exploration of the various nodes of struggle in the garment sector that has emerged since the global financial crisis in 2007-2008.

The thesis is structured in an unconventional manner because it is a ‘submission by papers’ which is an option offered through the School of Geography and Environment at Oxford University. The ‘paper route’, rather than one large monograph, is a series of papers either published or sent to established peer reviewed journals, which do not necessarily have to have been published. In addition the ‘paper route’ requires an introduction, literature review, and conclusion. However, I have included a historical background and theoretical foundation within the literature. Additionally, I have included a brief methods chapter because to leave it out, per the paper route minimum requisites, would have left many unanswered questions regarding data gathering, standpoint, process, and design. One of the flaws of the ‘paper route’ is that it can feel repetitive because evidence needs to be reiterated since each empirical chapter technically stands alone. This stand-alone structure of the paper route may be less cohesive than a traditional monograph. Indeed, this is another one of the weaknesses of this approach. However, while the papers within this thesis are disparate cases, I have endeavoured to ensure they are

theoretically consistent, tied together by a unified theme and underlying question.

Another strength to the 'paper route', especially when based on a multiple case study approach such as this thesis, is that it allows for a wide array of findings, though some may question the depth of these results. The findings throughout the research explain issues of power and contestation, capital-labour relations, and labour organizing within the garment sector:

- a. The need for a legal mechanism that can be enforced from the shop floor in the establishment of workers' rights in the garment sector.
- b. The embryonic stage of the global relocation of capital began within and between the United States of America.
- c. The efficacy of 'bottom-up' (rather than 'top down') policy generation.
- d. The strength of face-to-face negotiations between factory-level unions and TNC executives.
- e. Vertically integrated apparel brands are more vulnerable to sustained unionization campaigns and less likely to 'cut-and-run' due to sunk costs.
- f. Organizing subcontracted garment workers in a single country is unsustainable and will almost always result in capital flight.
- g. Garment workers are transforming tools of exploitation, such as flexibilised, feminised, and globalised conditions, into instruments of liberation.

- h. There is evidence to suggest that garment production in a 'post-China' environment is reaching the twilight of, what Harvey (2006a) and Silver (2003) call, the 'spatial fix.'
- i. Supplier-end firm integration is aggregating the power of producers, which is transforming some specialized supply chains in garment and footwear from *buyer-driven* chains towards *buyer-producer symbiosis*.
- j. Supplier factories are growing in capacity, increasing in productivity, and ensuring a greater value capture at the bottom of the global supply chain.
- k. The concentration of supplier factories may be resulting in greater negotiating power of garment manufacturers vis-à-vis brands, and garment workers vis-à-vis manufacturers.
- l. Consumer power around the world is helping change the demography of the drivers of anti-sweatshop campaigns.
- m. The growth of consumption in the Global South is helping to build greater south-to-south, worker-to-worker connections.

Outline of Thesis: Five Cases from Around the World

The research has allowed me to draw a number of empirical and theoretical conclusions based on the campaigns within the global garment sector. These campaigns reveal critical insights into the dynamics and interactions between labour and capital from various angles and points of the global garment sector. The cases are also based on my own involvement with the campaign for a global Jobbers' Agreement with the transnational brand Adidas led by the

League (I explain my involvement in more detail in chapter 3), which acted as a nodal point within the thesis. Within the cases I use the League as a point of entry and departure from disparate vantage points: temporally, spatially, from below and from above. The purpose is to paint a historical and transnational narrative of the anti-sweatshop movement as a method to understand the shifting dynamics of the global garment trade and how this dynamic is informing the strategies and tactics of workers and activists.

In the thesis I investigate the historical, economic, political, and labour geography of the garment sector using both existing worker struggles as well as the capacity for struggle as its key point of interest. By using a case study approach to focus on specific labour organizing across space and time from Europe and the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century to contemporary workers' struggles in Honduras, Bangalore, Cambodia, Turkey, and China, the aim is to reproduce campaign success and learn from defeat. Though specific to the garment sector, the research addresses much larger questions regarding labour intensive production, automation, the movement and circulation of capital, the relationship between workers and bosses, and the wider machinations of capital accumulation.

The garment sector represents a truly global industry. Through harmonization, mechanization, low-capital investment and vertical disintegration the power of the value chain has been consolidated in the hands of a few large buyers in an attempt to structurally hinder the establishment of a minimum standard of workers' rights, a point I contextualise through the use of case studies throughout the thesis. Although the cases within the research are

geographically dispersed, an individual case reveals truths about the garment sector in other parts of the world. Thus global research can be its own form of triangulation. As I point out in the literature, there is a profusion of research that corroborate the evidence of dismal wages, a near obsolescence of workers' rights, and deteriorating workplace standards embodied by the appalling building collapses and fires that have plagued South Asia's garment factories in recent years.

In the final two empirical cases in the thesis, within chapters 7 and 8, I delve into the role and future of garment production in economic development, especially as the sector is a typical starter industry being the first to arrive and the first to depart in early industrialization. In recent years garment sector production has tended to concentrate in labour rich but developing economies, a trend that is now unabated due to the end of the MFA (Lopez-Acevedo and Robertson 2012). However I maintain that there is also a greater concentration of production from fewer firms. Another change is where these products are destined, which is discussed in great detail in the final two cases within the thesis that examine workers' struggles at a garment warehouse in India and a footwear producer in China. Whereas garments were often destined for consumer markets in developed economies, changes toward a multipolar world is altering consumption patterns and the power of workers and activists to attack capital on multiple fronts and build worker-to-worker solidaristic links.

The thesis is an attempt to analyse the methods by which garment workers resist across the world through a number of case studies. Through this approach I endeavour to situate workers as subjects in the making of global

capitalism rather than objects of capitalist exploitation, as active agents rather than helpless victims, which stands in contrast to nearly all of the mainstream depictions and much of the academic research on garment workers whose characterization and disadvantage is compounded by race and gender.

Chapter 4, the first case entitled 'Stitching Together', draws largely on literatures within labour studies and geography. It was written with the research assistance of a labour organizer based in Central America who helped in data gathering. The case, based on evidence the methods of which are described in detail in chapter 3, lays out the historical foundation; setting the stage for how workers arrived at the present conjuncture by highlighting the 2008 successful struggle of workers at a Fruit of the Loom factory in Honduras. Out of the Fruit of the Loom victory a strategy emerged, one that was not without historical precedent. Workers confronted both the point of consumption and production to demand direct negotiations with the brand. The strategy had been adopted within the domestic sphere almost exactly a century before in New York City by the International Lady Garments Workers Union (ILGWU), but just as the textiles/garments/footwear (hereinafter 'garments') sector of the US withered away so too did the efficacy of the same strategy. With a bit of tweaking, and institutional memory, the workers of Honduras looked beyond the victory at their shores to build an international campaign to outrun capital itself.

The case documents the story of workers such as Reyna Dominguez and her co-workers struggling with impossibly low wages, long hours, and verbal abuse from supervisors demanding unreachable production quotas. These

conditions, of course, were not the exception to the rule in Choloma and in export-processing zones worldwide born out of a patchwork of free trade agreements. What was relatively uncommon however is what the workers decided to do about it.

Ultimately, it is clear that the campaign's achievements were not an outgrowth of northern benevolence nor the goodwill on the part of Transnational Corporations (TNCs), the state, or supranational bodies, but through contentious politics from the factory floor supported by an economic response at the point of consumption. Through a two-pronged strategy, workers in the periphery attacked the source of capitalist production while activists in the core responded through a comprehensive coordinated retail boycott, targeted at the consumer, retail, licensing and political levels.

While activists' attempts to put power back in workers' hands have mostly been frustrated, the events that unfolded at Fruit Of The Loom factories in Honduras are reason for great optimism about workers' ability to fundamentally transform labour relations in the global garment industry. Thus it became that capital utilized outsourcing for 100 years, degrading labour's structural power, first domestically then internationally. Organized labour remedied its structural disadvantage with the jobber agreement until capital's globalisation, dislodged this regime, replacing it with the auditing regime. Activists soon realized that auditing failed to mediate the severed relationship between labour and outsourcing companies, representing an impotent substitute for the former regime's triangular contracts system. The auditing regime left workers with no formal power to enforce the 'rules' (i.e. codes of

conduct), and no accountability over the race to the bottom's drivers – outsourcing companies. The case was published in the labour studies journal *WorkingUSA: Journal of Labour and Society* in June 2014. The second author, Jack Mahoney, whose responsibility was largely limited to conducting interviews in Honduras, is an El Salvador-based labour organizer (statement submitted with thesis).

The case in chapter 5, titled 'A Global Contract to End of Sweatshops', builds on the first by tracing the genealogy of anti-sweatshop strategies that resulted in the one employed in Honduras as well as linked - theoretically, empirically, or methodologically - to the other cases that follow in later chapters in the thesis. This case focuses on analysis of the trajectories of the US and European garment sectors in order to compare global strategies to develop workers' rights. Here I compare the legal, practical, and policy oriented concerns of labour organization and the existing solutions to employer intransigence, a comprador state, and footloose capital within the sector. The case is primarily a comparison between International Framework Agreements (IFAs), which are the dominant form of arrangements between Global Union Federations (GUFs) and TNCs, with the demands put forth by the U.S. anti-sweatshop movement and the League's demand for a global Jobbers Agreement as part of the legacy of the U.S. garment workers' movement.

The creation of an international 'community' necessitates its own kind of *imagineering*, to take a term from Benedict Anderson (2006). To counter the established set of ruling ideas and customs means constructing an identity as workers with a similar class interest despite geographic, linguistic, or ethnic

differences. This challenge is intensified at a global level in which nurturing a collective consciousness among those with wide-ranging experiences and interests may often clash.

Finally, the second case illustrates the feasibility of global collective bargaining within the garment sector through a historical analysis of the transition from domestic to global garment production. I argue that although globalisation exacerbates the asymmetrical relationship between ‘buyers’ and ‘producers’, capital and labour, it remains an extension of the well-established regime of garments production within the U.S. Thus an attempt to globalise the Jobbers’ Agreement strategy, one that was so effective when production was within the boundaries of the Global North, has the potential to finally establish rights for workers in the sector across the world. The case is based on interviews with trade unionists within the U.S., Cambodia, and Turkey to understand the efficacy of existing struggles to establish transnational rules for the garment sector. It encompasses multiple disciplines including labour geography, global policy, and international political economy, and was submitted to the *Review of International Political Economy* in September 2014.

In the third empirical case, titled ‘Interwoven Threads: Building a Labour Countermovement in Bangalore’s Export-Oriented Garment Industry’ and the subject of chapter 6, I explore in-depth the Bangalore’s Garment And Textile Workers’ Union (GATWU). Here I grapple with key political and practical questions of international labour solidarity by focusing on new organizing strategies, spaces, and synthesis. I develop a number of lines of inquiry but ultimately focus attention on how the feminisation,

informalisation, and internationalisation of the workplace resulted in a transformation in labour organising strategies. Central to the case is an analysis of how workers subvert the tools of oppression into instruments of liberation.

The aim of the research in this third case is to explore in great detail the ways and geographic context in which a single trade union attempts to confront the challenge of organizing workers for collective power in the context of transnational capital mobility. Part of the empirical case includes a look at the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI). The NTUI, an India-wide amalgamation of independent trade unions and social movement organizations, formed in the mid-1990s and federated in 2006, employs innovative organizing methods, and endeavours to create a cross-sectoral and supply-chain organizing strategy to put pressure on transnational capital primarily at the regional, but also at the global, level (*Report of Founding Conference, 2006*). The NTUI believes that in the current context of globalisation, trade unions must go beyond the factory gates into the community, building strength with workers along the commodity chain, as well as consolidating material links with trade unions across the region (Mansingh 2008).

NTUI's approach is able to remain focused on traditional issues of livelihood while, at the same time, opening up a multitude of new angles from which neoliberal repression may be attacked and uprooted, from agriculture, to the factory floor, to transportation, as well as wider issues of privatization and gentrification. It also draws women into the movement. At the family and community levels and by building domestic, regional and international links

with trade unions in the supply chain, independent organizations are being formed and strengthened in other industries and services as well as along gender lines within Bangalore's outlying slums. Through these grass-roots efforts, established borders between, for example, workers and the unemployed, the workplace and home, and men and women activists, are gradually being erased. Communities are adapting to neoliberalism by co-opting its own strategies, its own fluidity and disregard for antagonistic forces, and adopting their own universal currency, not capital, but human to human relations. By functioning as a broad-based organization, the union attacks the source of capitalist production - the exploitation of labour - and consequently, the intermediate stages of the supply chain, even at the point of consumption. Through this larger, big picture strategy, the union has become both internationalist and identity-specific, organizing women and low-castes independently, for broader demands that are intended to affect the entire working-class. By reinventing the theoretical framework of 'social movement unionism,' as detailed by Seidman (1994), it is possible to observe how, for example, the Garment And Textile Workers' Union (GATWU) along with its federation's, New Trade Union Initiative's (NTUI) broad coalition, including the National Alliance of Women's Organization (NAWO), Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Dalit organizations, tribes, and other unions, may affect workers' consciousness and the reconfiguration of transportation and logistics along the garment supply chain in South India. The case was published as a paper in the urban geography journal *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action* in November 2014.

The fourth and fifth cases, in chapters 7 and 8 respectively, both analyse the changing dynamics of garment capital through the lens of specific workers' struggles. The fourth case, titled 'Cotton Field to Retail Rack', is based on my participant observation in Ramnagara, India, during a protracted unionization drive at a warehouse owned by Indian denim giant Arvind Limited. The chapter begins with a comprehensive analysis of Arvind's growth from textile factory to a transnational 'full package' supplier with integration across the garment supply chain, from the textile mill to retail shop. What becomes evident is that growth and technological advancement within specialized garment production is changing the materiality of workers' struggles and bargaining power. Despite workers losing their battle with Arvind, the case finds that the bargaining power of workers was strengthened following the changing relationship of producers and buyers.

The analysis of the final two cases outline the changing political economy within the garment sector and demonstrate how this has opened up new kinds of organizational 'fixes' (Harvey 2006a) and opportunities for workers to take innovative tactics, strategies and organizational forms to win power at the workplace. When garment sector capital relocated to the Global South the physical distance became greater between spaces of value capture and places of value creation. However, greater value capture at the point of production through economic upgrading has meant that supplier-end producers can invest in greater technology, larger-scale production facilities, the acquisition of smaller firms, which help augment the firm's value capture.

Simply put, producer firms are now showing early signs of consolidation, mirroring the buyers at the other end of the global value chain.

Under this composition of capital, my evidence suggests, workers are changing strategies and organizing themselves to demand a greater share of the value extracted from their labour from their direct employers. However, this does not mean success for the workers of Arvind in the short-term. Again, this case shows the internal contradictions of globalisation and capitalism. The increasing power of the local firm also makes possible a more powerful garment working class, but equally, this means that the direct employers have a greater degree of financial power to undermine workers' struggles.

There are a number of factors that have led to industrial upgrading in specialized garment production, transforming capital-labour relations in the sector, which is symptomatic of a larger shift of manufacturing capital from the Global North to Global South. I argue that a major factor that led to the departure from 'comprador capital', indigenous firms that piggybacked on foreign corporations who sought access to cheap labour and raw materials from the post-colonial to the early post-reform period, towards a maturation of capital that was monopolistic (or oligopolistic) in nature, was the 2005 end of the MFA. Crucially, I pursue the argument that the post-MFA period has seen the mergers, acquisition, consolidation, or closure of many smaller firms in the far-flung corners of the world and the growth of larger suppliers in a handful of countries, often cornering the supply chain of a given specialised product, resulting in greater value capture at the supplier-end of the clothing commodity chain. While large retailers continue to see increased profits, large

outsourced garment and footwear producing firms have witnessed an exponential expansion and growth. I argue that this is contributing to greater technological upgrading and a transformation in the relationship in the clothing commodity chain from *buyer-driven* to a kind of *buyer-producer symbiosis*, which is directly informing and recalibrating labour resistance strategies. The fourth paper has been submitted to the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

The final case in chapter 8, titled ‘Consolidation within the Garment Sector and its Prospects for Labour’, serves primarily as a plausibility probe to highlight the case of highest manufacturing firm development within the garment and footwear sector, which reveals even greater changes in the relationship between brand and manufacturer than the case in chapter 7. Yet, despite its size and vertical-integration, the relationship between buyers and suppliers continue to remain asymmetrical in favour of buyers. The claims that I make within this case study are arguably the most contested within the thesis. The case is based on an analysis of the footwear manufacturer Yue Yuen strike in southern China in 2014. Building on the Arvind case, it calls into question one of the underlying assumptions that global garment value chains are decidedly ‘buyer-driven’, arguing that a new form of ‘buyer-supplier symbiosis’ in the labour-intensive productive sectors is emerging. The case also calls into question some of the underlying assumptions of the League’s strategy, which focuses its attention on the power of large brands and retailers against dependent supplier factories. The case concludes that the shifting dynamic of the post-MFA global garment sector has resulted in a concentration of supplier-

end capital. Through the acquisition of smaller manufacturing firms, larger firms have emerged as dominant players in the value chain. This concentration of capital at the bottom of the supply chain has resulted in an expansion both vertically and horizontally of large firms, as well as economies of agglomeration in industrial hubs, resulting in greater value capture at the supplier-end and increasing the negotiating power of workers on the factory floor. The paper was submitted to the journal *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Workers and Globalisation

This thesis builds on a number of disciplines including economic geography, international relations, and political economy, which have, for some time, I suggest, experienced a degree of labour blindness. Within geography my research is at the conceptual intersection of political and economic geography, and more specifically falls into the category of labour and industrial geography. Sections of the research also draw on ideas from gender studies and economic policy literatures. In addition to these conceptual frameworks and debates in this research I attempt to address central geographical questions regarding space and identity within the city, the role of the nation-state in the global economy, and changing geographic arrangement of garment labour and capital.

Within disciplines such as international labour studies, recent decades have seen an enormous amount of attention on China, its working conditions and the products produced there (Blecher, 2002; Lee, 1995; Pun, 2005) rather than on South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle-East or Latin America. This is understandable given the banning of independent trade unions, the size of its work force, and ubiquity of its products. In contrast, while there remains a level of academic attention given to the English-speaking, white-collar, call-centre workers of India (Batt et al., 2005; Cowie, 2007; Mirchandani, 2004; Russell & Thite, 2008; Taylor & Bain, 2005, 2006), studies of Indian industrial labourers and their organization are relatively few. China is where one of the case studies in this thesis is based and India is the focus of two of the five cases, another

case is based in Latin America, while a 'global case' includes an examination of struggles in Cambodia and Turkey.

The research grows out of much of the labour geography literature. The research lies at the intersection at geography and labour, which has, over four decades, transformed from workers as simply a variable within capital accumulation to being understood as a central component in the making and remaking of capitalism. Economic geographers have predominately attempted to understand capitalist geography and social relations as shaped by capitalists. Even amongst Marxists the economic geography was shaped primarily by the investment decisions of capitalists.

The development of "Labour Geography" from "Geographies of Labour" fundamentally revolves around workers positions from *objects* to *subjects* within capitalist relations. As Herod (1997: 1) has argued, many economic geographers "ignore the role of *workers* in making the economic geography of capitalism or have frequently conceived of them in a passive manner." Economic geographers across the ideological spectrum from Clark (1989) to Harvey (2006a) have characterized workers primarily as instruments within the accumulative process of capital.

However, the thesis analyses the position of workers adopted by labor geographers such Jane Wills and Andy Herod as subjective agents within capitalism. This is not to say the workers are the *only* component who shape and circumscribe capital but that workers play a crucial role. Within this this paper these are shaped by David Harvey's conception of the spatial, technological, and organisation 'fixes' by capital. These reactions by capital

grow out of its own crisis tendencies, which are ultimately brought on by workers' actions.

Though Marxists themselves rarely apply some of the principles of Marx himself, as it relates to the subject position of workers. Marx (1867) argues that subjective agency is borne out of the working class whose location in production gave them the power to act and that the very force of hardship (partially) precipitates revolt. The research supports a number of Marxian claims, but, in addition, maintains that it is workers' agency that leads to innovations within capital, concepts conceived by the Italian political theorist of the *Operaismo* ('workerism') and popularised by some world systems theorists and labour geographers (Silver 2003; Herod 1997b; Tronti 1966). The innovations of capital are, in part, a response to the subjective agency of labour. Indeed, contemporary changes in capitalist production unearth their own methods of resistance (Hardt and Negri 2005). Arguing that innovations of capital are shaped by the actions of labour and that labour is also shaped by capital, the paper traces the historical geography of capitalism and analyses the global garment sector in particular.

Many of the studies of radical formations within India have been underpinned theoretically by the influential school of post-colonial studies known as *Subaltern Studies* (see Chakrabarty, 2002; Guha, 1983; Chibber, 2013). Subaltern studies tend to emphasize the specificity of oppression outside of purely economic exploitation, theorizing on the different trajectories of development between the formerly colonising and the formerly colonised. However, ethnographies of individual factories without a broader analysis

remain limiting in the new 'global factory' of capital hypermobility (Kelly, 1998). Borrowing from Massey (1995) the research within this thesis views global capital as a reconfiguration of spatialised social relations, and explores, within this framework, how union workers confront these spatial boundaries by redefining national borders, production, oppression, and what it means to be a 'worker'. These case studies do not observe contemporary social movements as a reified 'unusual activity against a static backgrounds', as Cox and Nilsen (2007, 1) argue is pervasive within social movement research, but rather as part of a wider historical geography of capitalism.

Beyond understanding unions primarily as work-based organisations, Seidman (1994) uses the example of Brazil and South Africa to argue that material conditions forced unions to build coalitions to make structural economic and social demands, or what has been termed 'social movement unionism.' All the unions or collective action that are included within this thesis are, in part, successful because they represent a departure from the status quo, with political autonomy and a broad-based ideology being some amongst many similarities to Seidman's cases. For example, the legal and political conditions at the time of the militant labour upsurge in South Africa and Brazil parallel the corporatist legislative realities within Karnataka industrial areas (*Report of Founding Conference*, 2006; Seidman, 1994). This independence, Kideckel (2009) indicates, has permitted the NTUI, which is highlighted in chapter 6, to break with a culture of intense Indian trade union sectarianism, and actively work in solidarity with Communist Party and Communist Party (Marxist) affiliated unions in protesting privatization efforts.

As such, NTUI's independence of political parties could provoke a form of worker collective representation that circumvents some of the traps of populist politics thus posing an entirely different kind of subaltern movement unionism. Similarly, lacking a legitimate trade union, striking Yue Yuen workers in China, outlined in chapter 8, are able to make radical demands not circumscribed by a union bureaucracy bound together with, what Louis Althusser (2005) calls, the 'ideological state apparatus.' Whilst at the same time, Yue Yuen's striking workers lack a 'social movement', in what Friedman (2014) characterises as 'alienated politics'. In other case studies with this thesis we find that workers in Honduras in chapter 4 as well as the demands put forth by the International Union League for Brand Responsibility ('League') in chapter 5 remain outside of the global trade union structure opening up new vistas of struggle.

Critical to understanding the power of workers within the garment sector is to make sense of global value chains; the cases largely apply a Global Commodity Chains (GCC) framework (Gereffi 1994a; Bair & Gereffi 2001; Gibbon 2001). Within the existing GCC literature, most of the attention is given to issues of governance, which includes elements of power relations, but only between buyers and suppliers, with less consideration for employer and worker power relations at the production end in sectors characterised as 'buyer-driven' such as garments (Coe, Hess, & Dicken, 2008). Most literature on the configuration and constitution of commodity chains and production networks conclude that labour is relatively powerless (Frenkel 2001). Studies that do incorporate labour dynamics, like Selwyn (2007), Collins (2001), or Nielson & Pritchard (2008), focus on trade union power, labour unrest, and its impacts on

commodity chain configuration with singular agriculture-based models.

However, there remains more of a gap in the literature in the study of labour power and its impact on complex commodity networks such as garment production. The research that does address workers' power does so as the recipient of capital's decisions not as active agents in making and remaking capital-labour relations (see Boston 1987; Blecher 2002; Esbenshade 2004).

Thus, an insight into workers' power, organisational structure, and collective consciousness is essential to understand the trajectory of production and the polity of the region, to research the (re)configuration of regional and global commodity chains in lieu of the expiration of the MFA and to documented successes or failures of new forms of resistance to exploitation.

However an analysis of production and power would be incomplete if it did not incorporate the dynamics of the other phases in the supply chain including consumption as well as the role of the state. Peter Dicken (2006, 4) describes the global commodities as 'derived more and more from an increasingly complex geography of production, distribution and consumption.' Dicken recognizes the changing position of the state as, at times, antagonistic to capital as now integral in enforcing its will through its various appendages such as militarized borders, its laws or the military. What we find throughout the world are coalitions of social movement actors at production, distribution and consumption cobbling together one of the only means of combating the asymmetrical relationship between capital and labour in the new international division of labour.

This understanding of the neoliberal state and globalised capital has been analysed extensively. Holloway (2002, 13) points out the limitations of state power under the regime of neoliberal capitalism, stating that ‘the fact that work is organized on a capitalist basis means that what the state does and can do is limited and shaped by the need to maintain the system of capitalist organization of which it is a part. Concretely...any government that takes significant action directed against the interests of capital will find that an economic crises will result and that capital will flee from the state territory.’ Sivanandan (2008, xiv) takes this further, claiming that not only are states limited in opposition to the interests of global capital, but that the state is now merely an appendage of global capital; ‘the state in the global era is no longer... working on behalf of its people but a servitor of the global economy run by multinational corporations and the market. We have moved from the welfare state of late industrial capitalism to the market state of global capitalism, the market state is the vehicle of global capitalism.’ Sivanandan’s description of the state’s role matches the experience of workers within the cases in this thesis, especially as they are within the context of the newly industrialising Global South.

In the context of the Global South, Ramaswamy (1984, 1) argues that ‘it is the endeavour of everyone to influence the exercise of state power, whether individually or through organized pressure groups. The power of the state is especially formidable in developing societies like India.’ This position is consistent with India’s economic development model preceding the introduction of neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s. The state loomed over as

an omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient repository of power where scarce resources could be allocated. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels (1848) observe that 'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.' Marxists have argued that the modern capitalist state is but a handmaiden to the capitalists to accumulate more capital. Rameswamy (1984, 6) extends his critique of the state to the trade union structures that 'have taken over the task of controlling and disciplining the labour force on the capitalist's behalf.'

While the debate continues over the changing relationship of state and capital and whether the state has now ceased to be an institution capable of exerting influence, there remains broad agreement that a single state has little power over transnational capital (Arrighi, 2000; Brenner, 1999; Cerny, 1997; Dunning & Press, 2000; Evans, 1997; Harris, 2003; Robinson, 2001; Swank, 1998; Teeple, 1995; Yeung, 1998). Arguably, as states have become more economically dependent within 'globalised' capital their actions cannot be analysed in isolation. Economic and political institutions must now be assessed within the context of the broader machinations of transnational capital. As I elaborate within the empirical cases in chapters 4, 6, 7, 8, all of which illustrate the state, through its apparatchiks in different contexts but within neoliberalism, fundamentally operating in the interests of either transnational capital or the domestic bourgeoisies. In chapter 4, the state does not intervene when the factory is closed in Honduras; in chapter 6 state bureaucrats and city planners in Bangalore reliably favour the factory owners and management; in chapter 7 the police and the district labour commissioner assist the factory management

who work in the interest of the factory owners, and finally in chapter 8 a confluence of actors including the central Chinese state, state media, local administration, and even the state union, function independently from capital, even conceding a bit of ground to the striking workers of Guangdong, but ultimately to the benefit of capital.

Globalisation and its Origins

What is commonly referred to as ‘globalisation’ means many things but is frequently described as the growing cultural, economic, or social interconnectedness across the globe. The focus of this thesis is on the *economic* as it relates to the relationship between capital and labour, maintaining that globalisation is principally the globalising of manufacturing and finance capital. There is much debate amongst scholars over the conceptualisation of globalization with Haas, Hird, and McBratney (2009, xxvi) arguing that the ‘consequences of globalization are deeply contested – as are the available techniques for altering the distribution of the costs and benefits.’ However, there is broad agreement amongst the various camps that globalisation has led to intensified trade competitiveness, multi-nationalisation of production, and integration of financial markets (Ohmae, 1993; Kramer, 1995; Hensman 2001; Harvey, 2005; Keily 2005; Munck 2008).

While there are contested explanations for the specific origins of globalisation, the paper shares the reason expounded by David Harvey. Harvey (2005) maintains that what he terms as ‘neoliberal’ globalisation began in the late 1960s as a response to the antagonisms of the organized working class in

the Global North and as a method for capital to combat its crisis of profitability. The process of globalisation has radically empowered TNCs, injecting capital into landscapes that were once insulated from global capitalism. Now, with largely unrestricted access to Chinese, Indian, Central European and former Soviet Bloc nations, capital has benefited from a consequent proletarianization, opening up greater opportunities for capital, especially in labour-intensive manufacturing, to take advantage of a seemingly unlimited and growing pool of labour (Bronfenbrenner, 2008).

Globalization and the State

The role of the state within globalization has also been heavily debated. The conventional state, claimed to be an effective regulator of the economy (Crouch 1997, 173), is challenged by globalization. Schmidt (2002, 13) maintains that 'exogenous pressures caused by globalisation have increased in magnitude, speed and volatility...[and has] decreas[ed] national governments' ability to control their effects. This view is supported by many other academics (Crouch & Wolfgang, 1997; Haas et al, 2009). Keohane and Nye (1972, 393) suggest that a 'control gap' has emerged between states' desire to regulate stocks and flows and their capacity to do so. Thus, it is argued that international economic integration is in fact interdependence and the movement of capital across borders challenges the role of the traditional nation state (Crouch & Wolfgang, 1997; Haas et al., 2009; Keohane & Nye 1972).

The origins of this globalisation process and the state, or what Marx called the 'world market' (1867), is not accidental but was forecast as part of the

development of capitalism. As early as the turn of the 20th century, Lenin (1999) predicted a deepening of nation-state rivalries, thus challenging Kautsky's vision of 'ultra-imperialism', in which competing nation states would make way for the combined exploitation of the world by international capital. Robin Murray (1971), writing at the onset of the international economic crises of the 1970s, contended that the internationalisation of capital weakens the power of the state as well as that of the domestic bourgeoisie whilst simultaneously strengthening foreign capital and maintaining interstate rivalries, in what he terms the 'territorial dialectics of capital'. Subsequently, Nicos Poulantzas (1978, 73) presented a critique of Murray's claim recognised the domination of American capital in its internationalization that 'neither suppresses or bypasses national states, either in the direction of a peaceful integration of capitals 'above' the state level, or in the direction of their extinction by the American super-state', and insisted that such domination is maintained by and integrated within national capitals and host states. In this scenario, states themselves become internationalized, not that they lose their 'sovereignty', but the dominated states internally articulate their relationship to the dominant states. As such, over time, this process of globalised capital strengthens the hand of the state and the domestic bourgeoisie.

In this vein, Radhika Desai (2013) has recently observed what she considers to be a hardening of the materiality of nations in which the ongoing reconstitution of the capitalist world order is still primarily the result of the interactions between states. Desai argues that the state nevertheless plays an increasingly stronger role in managing capitalism's crisis tendencies. Likewise,

Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch (2013), expanding on Poulantzas and Ellen Meiksins Wood (2005), and regard the state as central to the making of 'globalisation'. To Gindin and Panitch (2013, 1) states supply the infrastructure on which global markets depend, while capital depends on states 'maintaining property rights, overseeing contracts, stabilizing currencies, reproducing class relations and containing crisis.' This suggests that globalisation has both led to individual nation-states forgoing an element of their sovereignty and autonomy, whilst also managing the expansion of capital's terrains of profitability and mitigating capitalism's crisis tendencies.

Labour Internationalism

These and other geopolitical developments have radically empowered some TNCs, injecting transnational capital into once insulated landscapes. With access to newly industrialised often formerly colonised nations, the process of globalisation has witnessed a mass expansion of the global pool of wage-labour, opening unprecedented opportunities for capital to exploit an army of surplus labour (Bronfenbrenner, 2008). Roy (2004, 28) describes the colonial relationship as beyond the jurisdiction of sovereign governments, stating that, 'radical change cannot and will not be negotiated by governments: it can only be enforced by people. By the public. A public that can link hands across national borders' (2004, 29). While the kind of internationalism Roy calls for had not been seen in the labour movement for nearly a hundred years, in some senses neoliberal globalisation forced trade unionists and activists to look beyond their borders. As Stiglitz (2006, 7) argues, after the 1999 WTO protests

in Seattle it became clear that ‘globalisation had succeeded in unifying people from around the world – against globalisation.’ It is not the case that all, or even a majority of, workers and social movements united against globalization, particularly in places such as India (Hensman 2011), however the argument that neoliberal globalisation created its own form of organisation is supported within the cases of this thesis. Certainly, the evidence suggests that with increased global economic integrations, workers and activists sought to match this transnationalism and form structures of resistance that span the globe to challenge the force of capital.

As I document in chapter 5, the blueprint for the global ‘race to the bottom’ in the garment sector existed within the U.S. and labour internationalism traces its roots to a time long before ‘globalisation’. Links between workers are found in the earliest days of the industrial revolution (Featherstone 2012). Andrew Herod (1997) claims that such internationalist links began to form as a result of economic booms and crisis evident in the 1840s and 1850s and the utilizing of foreign strikebreaking workers during periods of labour unrest, especially by British employers. He states that the first structures of internationalism among labour can be traced to 1844 and the British Owenites and Chartists, together with refugees from Germany, France, and Poland, of the London-based ‘Democratic Friends of All Nations’. In the 1850s and 1860s over a half-dozen international worker organizations formed and trade unions in particular industries took shape. Herod (1997) argues that ‘the formal transnationalization of labour in many ways predates that of capital, at least with regard to the arrival on the world stage of the transnational

corporation and the global assembly, two entities which are often seen as emblematic of globalisation.' In sum, these examples of early internationalism illustrates that cross-border worker solidarity predates the contemporary incarnation of globalisation and transnational capital. However, with the intensification of this globalising process, worker internationalism becomes fundamental to the ability for workers to counter their conditions and aggregate their power.

Garment Sector Data

It is hard to pin down the exact number of garment workers worldwide. In the past 15 years it has been estimated to be around 26 million (ILO, 2000) and Hale and Wale (2011) believe that number is closer to 40 million and worth £190 Billion with year on year growth. Today that number may be lower due to firm consolidation and technological advancement, or higher due to greater consumption levels worldwide. Data on the informal garment sector is even harder to verify, though Miller (2008) suggests that there are the same number of workers in the informal garment sector worldwide as in the formal sector. Another statistic that is difficult to obtain in the sector is the historical changes in union density and collective bargaining (*see* Ishikawa & Lawrence 2005). Global Union Federation IndustriALL, which represents many garment trade unions globally, puts their membership in the sector at 1.7m as of 2007, and maintains that, at most, global union density in the sector is 12%, but this estimate is difficult to substantiate due to widespread reporting inaccuracies. Even within industrial clusters, such as those outlined in the cases within the

thesis, it is difficult to determine the exact number of workers or union density¹.

The garment sector is considered a “feminized” sector. In 1995, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization estimated that “more than two-thirds of the global labour force in the clothing industry is accounted for by women and the industry account for almost one-fifth of the total world female labour force in manufacturing.” As an example, within Bangladesh’s garment sector women account for an estimated 85% (Delahanty 2009). The garment sector straddles both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ sectors, which contributes to the difficulty of verifying exact numbers of workers. As outlined in chapter 6, “informalisation” is a deliberate strategy to undermine workers’ rights and regulate work-time to maximize profits, whilst also providing an important valve for women workers to enter and exit the labour market as needed.

This research is conducted entirely within the ‘formal’ garment sector. The export-oriented garment sector, especially for major brands, is conducted within registered large-scale factories. The implications of these data are that at most the findings will not be relatable to large swaths of ‘informal’ garment sector. Another inference from the data is that an analysis of the research must include a comprehensive analysis of gender, sexism, and patriarchy. Throughout the research gender and the positionality of women remains central. These dynamics are most pronounced in the case from chapter 5 and 6.

¹ Doug Miller (2008, 162) recounts an illustrative example from Bangalore to highlight the difficulty of verifying statistics within the sector.

The dearth of accurate data on workers but the abundance of data on capital shows the fundamental asymmetry of power within both the production of clothing and production of knowledge. It also reveals the asymmetry of research between labour-intensive and capital-intensive research as well as work considered 'masculine' and that which is considered 'feminine'. It reveals a necessity for more qualitative and quantitative research in the area.

The data from country is outlined within each case however within the context of the end of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) and because the research is not simply an analysis of working conditions but capital flows, investment, and labour-capital relations. The research is aimed at analysing both countries that have higher concentrations of capital since the end of the MFA, such as India and China, but also countries that have seen reductions in overall garment production such as Honduras.

The Structure of Global Garment Production

While numbers and sites of production vary, what has remained largely unchanged over a century or so of garment and footwear production is its supply chain. It begins with raw materials (such as cotton), which is then manufactured into textiles or synthetic and natural fibres; those textiles are then designed, cut, assembled, laundered, and finally a finished product is distributed, marketed and sold at retail shops (Bair & Gereffi 2001). Products have multiple component parts that make up the supply chain, which is hidden at the point of consumption. As Marx (1977) stated, 'from the taste of wheat it is not possible to tell who produce it, a Russian serf, a French peasant or an

English Capitalist’ – this is an observation that is still applicable today and as relevant to cotton goods as wheat. Even the label inside does not always reveal who sewed the shirt.

Clothing is one of the worlds largest and oldest export industries. Since the beginning of ‘globalisation’, around the late 1960s and early 1970s (Harvey, 2005), the economic geography of the garment industry has principally been determined by retailers as well as brand-name merchandisers, or ‘buyers’, who, through their ability to select suppliers from around the world, concentrate enormous profits and power away from those who produce the goods (Gereffi, 1994; 1999). The reconfiguration of technology and production has seen many TNCs abandon their in-house manufacturing capacity in favour of subcontracted supply-chains. This phenomenon is most evident in the labour-intensive global apparel industry, which Hale and Wills (2005, 5) describe as ‘the most globalised industry in the world’, where major brands almost always retain only the marketing, branding and design functions in-house². By exploiting geographic differentiation in costs, surplus labour, and state policy, TNCs have constructed complex supply chains and succeeded in transforming the global apparel industry into one of the most horizontally internationalist and vertically subcontracted areas of production in the world (Brooks, 2007; Carty, 2010; Hale & Shaw, 2001; Hale & Wills, 2005; Ho, Powell, & Volpp, 1996; Raworth & Coryndon, 2004; Rodriguez-Garavito, 2005; Tewari, 2008).

² Some brands like Adidas have a handful of small directly-owned shops, mostly to do samples or highly specialized products (an example of which is found in chapter 4)

The literature on subcontracting recognizes three primary motivations behind companies who choose to operate a vertically dis-integrated chain of production: cost savings from input prices, supplier firm flexibility of output, and specialization (Mead, 1984). These have always been motivations within the garment sector. Cheaper input prices resulting from outsourced production resulted in cost savings from raw materials and labour. This became exacerbated under globalisation, when the labour-intensive garment sector witnessed exponential profits by outsourcing its production to the Global South. Fluctuations in output because of seasonality have always been a prime motivator for brands to construct vertically dis-integrated chains of production in the garment sector. High demand for jackets, for example, is typically before and during the winter season, and similarly shorts and bikinis in the summer, although they are in the shops before their season. Another contributing factor to the erratic nature of garment production, but also its labour-intensity, is the ephemerality of fashion trends, resulting in the constant alteration of patterns, designs, and cuts. Again, this is dependent on specialization. These facts alongside low start-up costs meant outsourcing became central to the industry from the early days of mass garment production. Thus, brands find it more cost effective and risk averse to handle seasonal surges, fluctuating orders, and constantly changing fashion trends through outsourcing production (Collins, 2009).

No major parent company can undertake all the necessary links between production and distribution. However, in the garment sector there are some specialized producers that are more capital-intensive, and even some that are

vertically integrated such as large underwear brands as found in Fruit of the Loom's Honduran supply chain (outlined in chapter 4). This is because these products are largely immune from the 'seasonality' straightjacket and do not require the same laborious fashion-specific cut-sew-trim production process of most other garments. Most underwear is heavily standardized and thus has relatively high levels of mechanization and fixed capital expenditure. This has assisted in heightened trade union gains, at least at Fruit of the Loom's Honduras factories. Another example of specialization is found in denim and footwear production, outlined in chapters 7 and 8 respectively, which requires a greater degree of capital expenditure than a standard garment factory, thus opening up the space for upgrading and greater barriers to entry.

As explore throughout the thesis, there have been dramatic changes since the 2005 phase-out of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA). The MFA, originally negotiated in 1974, was a compromise between developed and developing nations in which rich (importing) countries agreed to establish textile and clothing quotas - quantitative ceilings - for each exporting country. The MFA meant that the garment sector became the most widely distributed industry in the world. Since its phase out, and the near end of quotas in the sector, global investment in the industry has been restructured, concentrating production in a handful of countries ensuring massive industrial job growth in China, Vietnam, Bangladesh and India³ (Majmudar, 2008). Ross (2011) sees these economic developments as a further entrenchment and expansion of

³ The Asian Bloc of China, Bangladesh, Indonesia, India and Vietnam make up 95% of all garment imports to the United States (B. Ross 2011).

capital across both the textile and clothing commodity chains, 'from the cotton fields to the retail rack.' Indeed, the combination of the phase-out of the MFA and the intensification of the globalisation process led to a greater consolidation of production in fewer countries including in China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam (Lopez-Acevedo and Robertson 2012), and, as I argue in chapters 7 and 8, consolidated in the hands of fewer firms.

Garment Capital's 'Petty Pilfering of Minutes'

A leading issue for many garment workers around the world is that of 'flexible' work schedules and non-payment of legally owed severance, wages, pensions, or other benefits. In the 19th century Marx (1867, 267), observing England's sweatshops, described the ingenuity of the capitalist class for its 'petty pilfering of minutes'. Marx was describing something he saw again and again by employers: compulsory overtime, wage theft, and non-payment of severance. These conditions mirror those of workers across the world today where the 'pilfering of minutes' is part of the arithmetic of capital accumulation. Neoliberalism has made the control of time essential to the mechanism for labour exploitation, with 'flexible' working schedules increasingly obscuring the demarcations between work and non-work in the Global North (Ward, Grimshaw & Beynon 2005).

In the Global South this 'pilfering of minutes' remains one of the most pressing issues of global outsourcing garment labour today in which the theft of an almost inconsequential amount of money for transnational brands remains

critically important for those entitled to receive it. The question of wage-theft can be found in cases such as Yue Yuen in China and PT Kizone in Indonesia, discussed in chapters 8 and 4 respectively, but plagues the entirety of the garment sector. By refusing what is legally owed to workers, brands not only retain a competitive advantage but also utilize refusal as a form of socioeconomic control, where the slightest agitation may result in a factory closure and non-compensation – this is a terrifying threat that hangs over the lives of workers and their families.

This standardised practice of non-payment of legally owed wages, severance, or social insurance is caused by the constant and mounting downward pressure on supplier factories to compete with one another in a ‘race to the bottom’ to secure orders from brands. Producing at the lowest cost to compete for business requires companies to cut costs where they can – the largest variable in the cost of production within labour-intensive industries such as the garment sector is labour (Hale & Wills 2005). This dynamic means that cutting costs must translate into the depressing of wages and the worsening of working conditions, whilst production targets steadily climb. Indeed, figures show that between 1989 and 2010 suppliers and countries with higher violations of workers’ rights increased their share of exports, whilst those demonstrating a higher level of workers’ rights have seen their exports drop (Anner, Bair, & Blasi, 2012). In summary, in modern-day garment production across the Global South violations of basic workers’ rights and chronic wage theft remain endemic.

Garment Workers' Unions of the Past⁴

Confronting the structures of the garment sector a century ago, the U.S.-based International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), forerunner to today's Workers' United, went directly to the buyers. Back then, the brand that placed orders in factories and sold the products to retailers was known as a 'jobber'. The ILGWU maintained that the responsibility of labour conditions rested mostly on these jobbers, and as such any agreement should be made directly between workers and the jobber, not the factory owners (a history that is comprehensively examined in chapter 5).

The first Jobbers' Agreement was established in 1922 (NYT 1922), but it was not until the 1930s, when the ILGWU locals went on strike, threatened additional industrial action, and conducted secondary retail boycotts, that the agreements began to expand and deepen. As Jobbers' Agreements proliferated, the membership of the ILGWU blossomed; it expanded from individual jobbers to a system that required jobbers to contract exclusively with a designated list of registered unionized factories (Wolensky, Wolensky, & Wolensky 2002). The Jobbers' Agreements heralded a new epoch for the life of the US garment worker, dramatically improving trade union density, factory conditions, and living standards. By 1938 *Life* magazine, in its 'Garment Workers At Play' cover story (Life 1938), declared that the era of sweatshops had come to an end: 'thirty years ago ...[the garment industry] stank of sweatshops' and now 'the sweatshop is virtually gone.' The Jobbers' Agreements were a critical tool for

⁴ Parts of this section has been taken directly from Kumar (2013).

the growth of trade union density, establishment of collective bargaining, increased pay, conditions, and benefits within the domestic garment sector.

Jobbers' Agreements changed the relationship between worker, factory owner, and buyer. The agreements served to regulate the industry, preventing competition between factories based solely on labour costs. They helped curb the hegemony of fluid capital, which pitted workers against each other to produce more and more for less and less. The ILGWU negotiated Jobbers' Agreements, effectively safeguarding labour costs, such as ensuring a living wage, between factory and buyer. These succeeded in alleviating the core disputes over subcontracted labour now rampant at a global scale.

Once more, then, as today, the balance between the global brand/retailer (the buyer) and the subcontractor (the producer) is decidedly in favour of the buyer. Yet through the power of collective bargaining and placing the responsibility squarely on the buyers themselves Jobbers' Agreements oversaw the introduction of a 35-hour working for garment workers, defined pension plans, family health insurance plans and wages equivalent to autoworkers (which I discuss in detail the chapter 5). The agreements ended sweatshops in the US apparel industry – that is, of course, until the onset, four decades later, of 'globalisation.'

By the late 1990s, the Jobber's Agreements were on their last legs, fizzling out alongside a dwindling US garment industry and a new era of transnational capital mobility, free trade, and a rebirth of the now *global*

sweatshop. As capital reproduced itself around the world, the subcontracted production networks of New York began to erode becoming *transnational* subcontracted production networks. The industrial district model characteristic of New York garment production was transformed into a global commodity chain structure. At that time the waning ILGWU were still fighting to grasp the last vestiges of a soon-to-be barren US garment sector. However, now a return to the conditions preceding those before the proliferation of Jobbers' Agreements is evident.

Garment History and the Present

Some of the regions of the studies in this thesis have witnessed an unprecedented growth in capitalism, consumption, knowledge and information, however workers in some such as agriculture or labour-intensive production have not undergone significant earnings growth (Roy, 2005). For example, informality in India remains acute and extensive (Mezzadri 2010). Roy (2005) points out that levels of precariousness and informality of India's labourers have come full circle in the past two centuries, expanding during market-led colonial India, contracting in the state-led socialist interlude, and once again expanding in the return to the market at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. These observations challenge the notion of the 'trickle-down' effect that remains a core component of neoliberal 'supply-side' ideology. While economic growth has been documented to have reduced poverty in parts of the Global South, the divide between rich and poor has become more pronounced globally, and particularly acute within the garment

sector where the wealth divide between brand owners and financiers on one side and garment workers and the other is marked.

Similarly, neoliberalism as a whole may be seen as a 'restoration' of the old regime. As Mark Fisher (2009, 32) points out, David Harvey and Alan Badiou both describe neoliberal politics as not about the new, but as a return of class power and privilege, '[I]n France,' Badiou has said, 'Restoration refers to the period of the return of the King, in 1815, after the Revolution and Napoleon. We are in such a period.' Fisher (2009, 32) goes on to cite Harvey, who argues that neoliberalization is a 'political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.' In terms of the garment sector, brands now wield more power and extract greater surplus value than ever before (Vijayabhaskar 2002), while workers are confronted with worse working conditions than their predecessors experienced in previous decades, a point I illustrate in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

The lesson that has been drawn is that subcontracted production did not begin with 'globalisation' and will not end in the foreseeable future, so strategies of resistance have attempted to lay the responsibility at the feet of the 'real' employer: the brands. A contemporary Jobber's Agreement would circumvent subcontracted factory owners to negotiate with brands around issues such as wages, conditions and union recognition. As outlined in the chapter 5, the announcement of a campaign for a global Jobber's Agreement represents a rebirth of a historic tactic for the globalised garment sector, and a watershed moment for global labour rights.

A Crisis in Garment Workers' Rights

The crisis of unionization and workers' rights globally is heightened in labour-intensive manufacturing, the largest and indeed most 'globalisable' of which is the garment sector. This is a sector in which real wages have fallen (WRC, 2013a), union membership are at historically low levels and are falling, with few cases of collective bargaining agreements (Anderson, Hamilton, & Wills 2011; Carswell & De Neve 2012; Mani 2011; Miller, 2008). The global apparel industry is arguably the most profitable and exploitative of the modern industries (Ho, Powell & Volpp, 1996), and has become a powerful force behind both the rise of the informal sector and the proletarianization of large parts of the Global South (Hale & Wills 2005). Gereffi (1994; 1999) posits that the global garment industry has shifted from 'production-driven' to 'buyer-driven' commodity chains. This has created a geo-economy of supply chains determined by retailers as well as brand-name merchandisers who, through their ability to select suppliers from around the world, concentrate enormous profits and power away from those who produce the goods. By exploiting geographic differentiation in costs, surplus labour, and the restructuring of state regulation, TNCs have been able to construct tighter and tighter complex supply chains and have succeeded in transforming the global apparel industry into one of the most horizontally internationalist and vertically outsourced areas of production in the world (Brooks, 2007; Carty, 2010; Hale & Shaw, 2001; Hale & Wills, 2005; Ho, Powell, & Volpp, 1996; Raworth & Coryndon, 2004; Rodriguez-Garavito, 2005; Tewari,

2008)⁵. Thus despite progress made in improving workers' rights when production was in the Global North, much of it has been undone since neoliberal globalisation, with TNCs able to accumulate greater levels of capital as a consequence. Since the early 2000s the garment sector has witnessed a decline in workers' rights benchmarks, and an increase in violations of core labour standards (Anner et al. 2012). Sexual harassment and extra-economic forms of exploitation compounded this even further in the feminised garment sector (Collins, 2009).

By some metrics the conditions of workers in the global garment sector are worse today than one hundred years ago. Globalised garment production fuses retrograde manufacturing practices with some of the most innovative techniques of labour domination. One major change is the mechanization of just-in-time supply chains, which have advanced radically. The garment sector uses variable production: supply must meet ever-changing consumer demands. The industry has remained labour-intensive, not lending itself to the automation found in other sectors (Bonacich 2001). As in the early 20th century, brands have limited fixed capital investment in production, which decreases liability whilst increasing labour flexibility and capital mobility. A brand's profit margins are squeezed out through variable capital such as labour, whilst constant capital, including raw materials, remains largely fixed (Bronfenbrenner 2007). Today's global sweatshops, like New York's garment

⁵ Though used interchangeably in this thesis, 'outsourced' is more accurate than 'subcontracted', since many factories are "contracted" (i.e. gets orders directly from the brand) while others are 'subcontracted' (i.e. gets overflow orders from some intermediary factory), and yet others are separated by 3 or more layers of contracting. This distinction is hugely important in trying to make brands responsible for labour abuse at a particular factory. 'Subcontracted' is often used with little regard for the distinctions between the specific nature of the sector.

sector before the 1930s, are marked by an absence of unions, below poverty-line wages, and chronically dangerous workplace conditions (Ballinger 2009; WRC 2013a).

The main reason for this enhanced exploitation is the mounting pressure on supplier factories to compete with one another in a 'race to the bottom' to secure business from brands. Producing at the lowest costs entails constantly tightening the screws on workers, depressing wages and worsening conditions, to allow production targets to climb steadily. Indeed, evidence of decreasing pay and workers' rights for garment workers in parallel with increasing profits and control of major apparel brands makes it difficult to argue against a greater distribution of wealth and power for workers within the global garment sector.

Two Decades of Anti-Sweatshop Campaigns

Since the arrival of globalisation, an abundance of methods have been utilised to confront the abysmal conditions workers face in the Global South. Approaches have spanned from 'fair trade' and International Framework Agreements (IFAs) to more voluntary codes of conduct and the inclusion of the 'social clause' in trade agreements. Today, there is a sense of acceptance among union activists that, despite some isolated successes, two decades of effort to establish workers' rights in the garment supply chain have done little to impact conditions or dent capital's relentless maximization of production. As Ballinger (2009, 23) claims, it is as if 'nearly twenty years of anti-sweatshop activism has come to naught.' Despite their efforts, traditional trade unions have faltered in

establishing a foothold in outsourced manufacturing companies that are largely at the behest of the transnational brands they produce for. Garment sector capital is marked by its ability to shift, manoeuvre, and relocate production at the slightest advance by organized labour on the factory floor with few sunk costs (Brooks 2007). Various strategies have been employed to fight a system of localized workers within the borders of a guarded nation-state and the hypermobile global power of capital.

Garment trade unions of the Global North initially reacted to capital flight and deindustrialization with calls for protectionism, blaming so-called 'cheap' workers in the South, making little effort to develop links between the two spheres (Brooks 2007; Kabeer & Mahmud 2004). The 1990s, however, witnessed a rapid expansion of global capital and with it an eruption of anti-sweatshop solidarity campaigns specifically targeting major clothing TNCs. These campaigns proliferated as stories of cramped factory conditions and the overworked, underpaid, women who toiled for long hours in the Global South began trickling up to the North.

The early 2000s saw a wave of animated grassroots anti-capitalist protest on the heels of the historic convergence of environmental and labour activists ('teamster and turtle') against the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999 and the development of a global resistance against neoliberal globalisation. An oppositional consensus began to take shape by workers and activists in both spheres of the globe. Yet despite widespread campaigning the conditions of garment workers remained largely unchanged and each unionisation effort

resulted in major brands 'cutting and running' to another site of production.

However, one of the only successful factory unionization cases (before the 2008 Fruit of the Loom case in Honduras highlighted in chapter 4) was in 2001 at the Korean-owned Kukdong factory in Mexico. Kukdong supplied collegiate apparel for sports brands Nike and Reebok. Workers went on strike after they were denied the right to form a union by their employer, what ensued was a standoff between workers and the brands as well as student activists at the point of consumption with direct contact with workers, and college administrators with direct contact with brand executives. In the end, the dual tactic of worker action and consumer solidarity resulted in the reinstating of all the sacked workers, recognition of the union, as well as collective bargaining (Hermanson, 2004). This multi-pronged campaign strategy ensured that action on the ground led by garment factory workers, dovetailed with consumer-end action in the form of boycotts, which ultimately built enough power to challenge transnational brands enough to change workplace practices, a strategy that is illustrated in Chapters 4 and 6.

Codes of Conduct

In the 1990s, students and activists were quick to capitalize on expensive big brand marketing by making demands on TNCs (Klein, 2000). TNCs in the garment sector responded to the flurry of anti-sweatshop activity in the north

by immediately introducing ‘codes of conduct’⁶. Codes of conduct, which are discussed further in chapter 4, were meant to inform consumers to choose products with higher ethical standards and sometimes included third-party monitoring of working conditions. While many codes included language on forced and child labour, few, if any, initially included many of the rights enshrined in the ILO core conventions, including collective bargaining or freedom of association rights (Sethi, 2002). As time went on other strategies were employed. Independent consumer groups attempted to create a market in union-made clothing. For example, Ben Cohen, of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream, attempted to produce and market in union-made t-shirts with his company SWEATX, which failed at ‘market penetration’ and the costs of the facility ran the company into the ground (Ross, 2006, 53). Later on, though the word ‘union’ continued to be avoided, many codes began to include ‘freedom of association’ provisions (Seidman 2007). Arguably, the avoidance of union-related terminology was a conscious effort on the part of brands to attempt to make unions and collective action appear old fashioned and irrelevant. Indeed, this is part of neoliberal vernaculars, in which unions have been actively erased discursively and legislatively (Harvey, 2005).

Today the code of conduct model within a consumer choice regime continues to remain the strategy of many first-world ‘anti-sweatshop’ or ‘fair trade’ NGOs, yet originally codes of conduct proliferated as a direct result of trade union pressure (Hale & Wills 2005; Murphy 2004). There exists a body of

⁶ A survey of forty-eight top U.S. apparel brands found that thirty-seven provided detailed labour practice corporate codes of conduct. Nike, examined in chapter 8 and Russell Athletic in chapter 4 both have long-standing detailed codes of conduct (US Department of Labour (1995), *The Apparel Industry and Codes of Conduct*).

literature analysing the effectiveness of establishing workers' rights solely through consumer choice of the Global North (Compa & Hinchliffe-Darricarrere, 1995; Jenkins, 2001; Kolk & Van Tulder, 2002; Liubicic, 1998; Locke & Romis, 2006; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996; Miller, 2004; Raiborn & Payne, 1990; White & Montgomery, 1980). Some conclude that these codes have proven useful as leverage during a corporate campaign (Hale 2000; Wills 2002), however the voluntary nature of codes have made issues of enforceability nearly impossible (Compa & Hinchliffe-Darricarrere, 1995; Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999; Herrnstadt, 2000; Hong, 2000; Liubicic, 1998; Lu, 1999; Rodriguez-Garavito, 2005) and still others claim that codes not only mirror, but entrench the asymmetrical power relations between neo-colonial and consumer-end development modes (Freidberg, 2003; Hughes, 2006; Hughes & Reimer, 2004). While NGOs and TNCs tend to support codes of conduct (Braun & Gearhart 2004; Compa 2004; Compa & Hinchliffe-Darricarrere 1995; Connor 2004; Kolk & Van Tulder 2002; Locke & Romis 2006; Sethi 2002), trade unions tend to call the expansion of trade union rights as the enforcement of workers rights from the shop floor (Gallin, 2001; Howse, 1999; Taylor & Bain, 2001). The varying perspectives on how to respond and resolve worker exploitation in the garment industry reflect wider ideological and political differences that exist: those who represent international aid organizations and TNCs have tended to support codes of conduct, either overtly or tacitly, while trade unions have tended to support the creation and support of trade unions to enforce workers' rights.

Proponents of codes have pointed to increases in wages in some

countries as examples of their efficacy but these results can often be attributed to other confounding variables. For example, the Harrison and Scorse (2010) study of the impact of anti-sweatshop activism on labour market outcomes in Indonesia found that wage increases were not on account of the highly publicized introduction of codes by major brands Nike, Adidas and Reebok but because of factory compliance with local minimum wage laws. Opponents argue that codes of conduct are a convenient public relations tool for TNCs in order to prevent the involvement of trade unions in the battle over workers' rights (Egels-Zandén, 2009; Egels-Zandén & Hyllman, 2006; Frundt, 2004; Roman, 2004; Sum & Ngai, 2005). Rohini Hensman (2011, 294) describes the flaws of the codes of conduct observed during a consultation in India in the late 1990s, with workers claiming that codes 'wont be much use', and that codes would only be effective when workers enforce them. Thus it is important to conduct a broader analysis of how and why workers' rights change in individual circumstances, before supporting a particular strategy to ensure improvements are made.

Along with the method of 'codes of conduct' market-based, consumer choice-driven, certification programmes such as 'fair trade' have been pervasive. These are primarily based in the agricultural sector and have little relevance to industrial labour conditions. Seidman (2007) argues that certification programs are a mere marketing technique to help establish 'premium' commodities in order to reassure ethically minded consumers. Citing the case of Rugmark in India, Seidman (2007) holds that certification schemes are corrupted by their inherent volunteerism (which proponents see

as its strength) and the very premise of consumers 'protecting' victimized workers. Volunteerism, Seidman (2007) claims, entrenches corporate power, since many of the 'independent' third-party NGOs that oversee the certification programs are funded by those very TNCs they are tasked with holding to account.

Consumer-driven efforts in the context of the garment sector have been heavily criticised. Brooks (2007) argues that the language of consumer agency where 'buying' remains central, privileges individual or institutional 'purchasing power' in the process. The hierarchy is further entrenched through the restrictive access to moneyed purchasing institutions, such as universities, with an inherent and increasingly restrictive access to a subgenre of elite students within the Global North with the time, wealth and educational access to act. For example in the chapter 4 I make reference to a consumer-led campaign called the Designated Suppliers Program that inadvertently vested power in western consumers by making students and university administrators the monitors of workers rights, which also explains its inefficacy. Thus it can be argued that those who toil in the production process remain further alienated from their labour, who, without access to incomes with 'purchasing power', are excluded and deprived of agency within a consumer-driven protest regime. Agency outside of consumption paradigms is organized in ways that make it politically and culturally palatable in the privileged North, often mirroring colonial structures. In addition, Brooks (2007) sees the political economy of consumer-led transnational corporate campaigns as depending on the patronage and sense of noblesse oblige of TNCs through regimes of

conscientious consumption which produce, reproduce, and promulgate the primacy of brand names themselves.

Transnational Governance Efforts for Workers' Rights

After realizing the shortfall of a consumer choice-centred strategy, some NGOs shifted gears, lobbying to provide resources to state governments to enable them to enforce their own labour laws. Advocates of this strategy, such as Dani Rodrik (1997), look to the regulatory power of nation-states in order to combat the hegemony of capital. This too, by all available accounts, has not proved fruitful, due to the changing relationship between global capital and the state (Hensman, 2011). As is illustrated particularly in the case of the strike in Guangdong, China in chapter 8, global capitalism is constructed in such a way as to compel states to consciously undermine their own laws to create the optimum environment for capital accumulation, or, in Marx's terms, to 'draw from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood' leaving the state an impotent mass (Marx & Engels, 1848; Taylor, 2009).

Thus activists began looking to non-state actors and institutions to enforce workers' rights from above. To quote Tilly (1995, 4): 'without authorities, no rights exist. However, the relevant authorities are by no means always sovereign states.' Unions such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) proposed subverting the meta-national governance regimes (free trade and WTO agreements), that have accelerated the capacity of capital to globalise, to include a minimal standard of workers to organize and collectively bargain (Breitenfellner, 1997; Compa, 2001; Dominelli &

Hoogvelt, 1996; Hensman, 2001; Howse, 1999; Klett, Ferguson, & Douglas 2004; Kucera, 2001; Leary, 1996). The demand for workers' rights through the supranational bodies of the GATT and WTO (commonly referred to as the 'social clause amendment') led to limited success (Bartley & Smith, 2008; Egels-Zandén, 2009; Fairbrother & Hammer 2005; Hensman, 2011). One of the few trade provisions that includes a degree of labour protections are the Maastricht Treaty in Europe and NAFTA's North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC). Compa (2001) and Wills (2002) argue that the success of the NAALC and Maastricht, respectively, depends entirely on the strength of existing trade union organization. Jane Wills (2002, 681) states that, 'while a majority would agree that there is a real need to regulate the actions of corporations and stop the 'race to the bottom', opinion is divided as to whether lobbying the WTO and using the ILO are the best way to achieve it. Indeed, as the WTO has led the process of neo-liberal globalisation, it has little credibility as far as social and environmental standards are concerned.'

As well as this method of enforcement, activists sought to enshrine labour rights through structures such as the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ILO states in its preamble that 'the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve conditions in their own country.' In 1944, the ILO reaffirmed the commitment to freedom of association and the right of workers to organize unions and engage in collective bargaining. However, David Harvey (2006, 56) argues that the existence or strengthening of guidelines at the supranational level does little to affect rights on the ground, 'even within the liberal

conception as laid out in the UN Charter there are derivative rights such as...rights to organize unions and the like. Enforcing these rights would have posed a serious challenge to the hegemonic practices of neo-liberalism. Making these derivative rights primary and the primary rights of private property and profit rate derivative would entail a revolution in political-economic practices of great significance.' As is demonstrated in chapter 5, the case on the feasibility of transnational collective bargaining, while organisations like the ILO exist ostensibly with the aim of improving workers' rights, operating within the confines of neoliberal globalisation makes challenging the status quo intractable.

Workers' Rights through Worker Self-Organisation

There is evidence to support the notion that a precondition to the enforcement of workers' rights is the establishment of worker self-organization through democratic trade unions (Boston, 1987; Chan, 2003; Gallin, 2001; Scherrer, Greven, & Ascoly, 2001; Taylor & Bain, 2001). As Jane Wills (2002, 677) argues, 'whatever rhetoric is adopted by corporations in their codes of conduct, or by campaigners in their battle against capitalist globalisation, it is critically important that workers have the right to organize on the ground.' As is detailed in chapters 4, 6, and 8, workers themselves have proved to be an effective arbiter of workers' rights rather than the TNCs of the Global North.

The appearance of new world production systems has forced trade unions that traditionally focus efforts at national-level targets to reach beyond their borders to coordinate, deepen and expand transnational cooperation to

pressure TNCs to guarantee an international framework of standards and rules. One such model can be found in the push by international unions to establish International Framework Agreements (IFA), formal and binding agreements that endeavour to secure a base floor of labour standards across a TNCs global supply chain. Though much has been made of IFAs in academic literature there are few examples of agreements that have translated into sustained trade union organizing, even fewer in recent years, and IFAs remain almost completely absent in the newly industrialized sectors of the Global South. As Bronfenbrenner (2008) points out, in 2007 only 55 IFAs had been signed, all but one with TNCs based in Europe, elevating the voices of the North speaking on behalf of workers of the South.

In addition, IFAs are limited in their enforceability, covering only a fraction of the global workforce, serving to assist rather than substitute for real trade union organizing at the local level (Wills, 2002). Beyond enforceability, IFAs rely on international trade unions within particular niche areas in agriculture and the service-sector (Anner et al. 2006). The primary weaknesses of IFAs are their reliance on the benevolence of TNCs, which is more a testament to the weakness of organized labour than that of the IFA (Egels-Zandén, 2009). However, as I show in detail in the chapter 5, IFAs serve as a valuable tool and hint at a greater potential for global supply chain trade unionism, transnational collective bargaining, and international worker solidarity. Thus, two-decades of international labour solidarity based on top-down approaches have failed to build capacity at the point of production in the Global South. The cases in this thesis should be seen as an alternative to the

existing top-heavy attempts at workers' rights in the garment sector or 'institutional transnationalism' discussed in-depth in chapter 5. One aim is to look at new rank-and-file, democratic, worker-led and horizontal strategies developed by workers and their unions to gain power in the new international division of labour.

Labour and Capital

The primary structural advantage of capital over labour is its ability to organize, aggregate, and mobilize around its common interests in a way that labour has not been able to. Yet, Marx maintained that by creating wage-labourers capitalism sows the seeds of its destruction. However, Vivek Chibber (2011) claims that challenging capital is not as straightforward and that the interests of these future 'gravediggers' are glaring, and that 'the rules of the game are such that workers will find it in their interests to pursue individual strategies of self protection rather than collective and organizational strategies.'

In Marx's *Capital* the relation between capital and labour is not personal but structural. Labour is not exploited by the capitalists but by capital – an impersonal working of the economic system. Labour produces capital, but capital acts as an alien force, which then oppresses workers. Marx's ideas about working class emancipation have always carried resonance with sections of the working class. However, his ideas are not an outline for a specific strategy or roadmap for how labour should go about building power and arrive at communism. Strategies develop through a process of learning by the working class through their experiences. Struggle is peppered with periods of reflection,

thus the cycle is as follows: struggle, reflection, experimentation of new strategies, reflection and so on.

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1992) believed that the industrial proletariat was the only class capable of creating a system of class alliances that could mobilise the working population against capitalism. As Hensman (2011, 15) states 'one of the lessons learned by workers very early on was that in isolation they could never resist domination by capital: the only hope of improving their lot lay in combining into a workers' union that eliminated competition among the workers who belong to it.' This would lead to the creation of powerful trade union movements in different countries that resulted in better wages, benefits, and working conditions at the workplace, and broader gains across society. As organized labour in the Global North made gains, capital too went through a process of experimentation and reflection, introducing organizational and technological changes in order to increase the extraction of surplus value. These changes thrust industry, and thereby society, forward at an accelerated rate. This process of action, learning and reflection characterises the complex and paradoxical relationship between labour and capital that continues today. Several existing empirical case studies strongly inform the research that follows in the empirical chapters of this thesis, including the landmark Burawoy (1979) study bringing Marxist analysis of the shop floor into an era marked by monopoly capitalism and Chari's (2004) study of mobility within the textile industry in South India.

The process of globalisation meant a downward pressure on labour standards and the erasure of barriers to imports resulting in an unobstructed

shift of production to countries with lower labour and environmental standards (Klein, 2000). Governments which depress wages, working conditions, and institute macro-economic policies that encourage labour migration into industrial areas are rewarded with higher FDI (Anner, Bair, & Blasi 2012). These are structural realities that act as a mechanism of coercion by the proprietaries of international capital against individual governments (Hensman, 2011).

In the Global North trade union membership was historically strongest in the manufacturing and nationalized industries, which plummeted as part of the global restructuring, and at the beginning of de-industrialization throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Pendleton & Winterton, 1993). The remaining holdout of union members remained in the 'immobile' sector such as the public sector which has gone through a phase of accelerated austerity since the global recession across the North and the inevitable loss a union density and power. In many countries the march towards a post-Keynesian economy began decades ago. For example, in the UK the total employment in public corporations between 1979 and not 1991 fell by around 66% from 2.1m to 0.7m (Losada 2010). During this same period, trade unions began to develop new strategies for organizing service and transport workers.

Post-China Production?

The dynamics of the garment sector are now changing dramatically, which is outlined in greater detail in chapters 7 and 8. One area that is being increasingly researched by organisations within financial services and consultancies but is perhaps in need of further academic research is the

relocation of labour-intensive production from industrial South China to Southeast Asia and parts of Africa. The issue of post-China garment production has been partially addressed within this thesis but is an area in which further study is needed⁷.

Since the 2008 global financial meltdown, some of Asia's most industrialized areas have witnessed an uptick of labour unrest (Galib, Munny & DING, 2011; Natsuda, Goto & Thoburn, 2010; Zhang, 2010). The Economist declared 'The Rising Power of Chinese Workers' (*The Economist*, 2010a) on its cover in 2010. Major companies are now attempting to find new sites to replace south China's rising labour costs. The question of 'where next?' persists, if territories including Indonesia, Peru, Mexico, Eastern Europe mature into service economies, where will capital next locate its factories and convert raw materials and labour into finished product? Africa, populous as it is, lacks the readymade infrastructure to support the logistics of large-scale manufacture. And though Cambodia and India, have variously been touted as the 'next China' (Roberts, 2010) the real truth in these prophecies has less to do with their inexorable transformation into tomorrow's workshops for the developed world, churning out new products to meet growing demand, than with their active resistance to such a future, a point which is central to the case studies that follow.

Vietnam has been suggested as possibly the next terrain for industrial labour-intensive capital (Zhu & Pickles, 2014), though inflation, labour

⁷ In an article I co-authored, Kumar and Gawenda (2013), I analyse the dynamics of post-China production and parts of this subsection borrow conceptually from that article.

discontent, and wage fluctuations remain live issues. Some industry has already shifted production from China to Vietnam. UNCTAD showed that net global FDI inflows fell by 18% worldwide in 2012, yet Vietnam was one of a handful of exceptions (UNCTAD, 2013). Vietnam's main appeal is that median wages are a third of China's (Accenture, 2011). Parallels with China abound; Vietnam bans strikes and independent trade unions resulting in arrests, detentions and deaths of activists (Siu & Chan, 2014). At the same time, the labour supply is significantly smaller than China's and Vietnam has had problems controlling its runaway double-digit inflation over the past five years.

Significantly, labour unrest has been escalating in Vietnam since 2005, when 9,000 workers at a Hong-Kong owned factory walked off the job. In 2006, an extraordinary surge in wildcat strikes led the government to impose a minimum wage-hike for workers at foreign-owned companies, then again in 2007 and 2009. Strikes have seen year-by-year increases in Vietnam since 2006 (Siu & Chan, 2014). In 2010 the government decreed a doubling of wages as workers continued to down-tools. In 2011, news hit the world of another strike wave with 800 recorded in the first 8 months of that year, the highest in contemporary Vietnamese history. Industrial actions continued into 2013 and the government decreed another 17% wage increase for factory workers. In other words, Vietnam is not an ideal replacement for southern China for international capital (Vir, 2013).

Others have suggested India as the new ground, what with its increasingly urban and abundant labour force, as a viable destination for China's exiled capital (Zhang, 2013). A 2012 graph produced by consulting group

McKinsey & Company (2009) shows that manufacturing's share of total employment falls as the economy grows with India on an upward trajectory in manufacturing. India boasts a burgeoning domestic consumer market and a vast informal army of labour with little protections that anchor-down wages across all sectors, whilst at the same time India maintains an underdeveloped infrastructure with deeper regulations on FDI, retaining many of its pre-liberalization macroeconomic policies like protections on freedom of association within the formal sector. These characteristics have meant that labour-intensive manufacturing has not shifted or outsourced to Indian firms at a significant level. Yet, it is clear that manufacturers in China have yet to show serious signs of moving south to the far less hospitable grounds of India.

Indonesia has also been mooted as a possible location, with its sizeable population and wealth of natural resources, and expected to overtake the United Kingdom and Germany to become the 7th largest economy in the world by 2030. A minimum wage of \$170 in Jakarta compared to \$240 in Shenzhen is described as the 'the least-unattractive country' to invest in the world at present (Cochrane, 2013). What the report fails to highlight is a labour movement that has been on the rise since popular protests brought down Suharto's authoritarian New Order in 1998. More recently as a result of a January 2012 strike of 20,000 workers outside Jakarta, the Employees Association and government agreed to a 15% wage hike. By October of 2012, 2 million Indonesian workers, from 700 companies, and 80 industrial districts, demanded higher pay and job security with union leaders vowing to continue strikes in the years ahead until gains were made. A claim that no doubt left

capital jittery at the prospect of large-scale investment.

Capital does not operate as a monolith but has particular trends and adopts a 'spatial fix' that have an overarching impact not only on the living standards of vast swathes of the world's workers, consumer prices, and the state of the global economy as a whole. Within this context, the garment industry has often operated as the canary in the coal mine. Historically the garment factory has been an important actor in the transition from a semi-agrarian to industrial economy. The sector is the first to arrive and the first to leave, and is typically the starting point of industrialization for a given nation and thus a predictive gauge of when and where capital will settle down next. The specificity of seasonality and ephemeral fashion trends as well as low-fixed capital investment means the garment industry has remained inoculated from a 'technological fix'. For labour-intensive and high-volume industries such as apparel and footwear the continued likelihood of offshore production facilities is almost certain. The end of the global garment quota, Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA), in 2005 saw a shift from globally disparate clothing production to the majority of the US' share of apparel production becoming concentrated in China. As expected large apparel subcontractors, like that of Japanese brand Uniqlo, have announced shifting over 2/3rds of its production out of China to Vietnam and Cambodia, a country which has also seen growing labour costs (Chu, 2014). Recently, major apparel brands, such as Adidas, announced that it would shift its Asian export-oriented production, with Adidas Group's Gregg Nebel proclaiming, 'we are rebuilding the industry in a post-China environment' (Willis, 2011).

It is clear that the changing labour dynamics in China will affect remuneration across the world. In the past when labour unrest arose in late-industrialized countries such as South Africa and Brazil, the immediate reaction by capital was to flee, and areas underwent accelerated levels of deindustrialization. For example, the industrial heartland of Sao Paulo had, by the late 1970s, become an epicentre of strikes and labour unrest, as wages rose and productivity fell, capital flight ensued. Many industries moved to other parts of Brazil.

The changing conditions of economic development and working-class consciousness may be opening new opportunities for innovative tactics, strategies and organization to win power at the workplace and in society, countering the popular Žižekian (1998) claim of ‘capitalism with Asian values’ (for which read: subservience). Cheap Chinese labour drove the engine of global capital into the new century. As French Philosopher Jacques Ranciere put it, ‘the domination of capitalism globally depends today on the existence of a Chinese Communist party that gives de-localised capitalist enterprises cheap labour to lower prices and deprive workers of the rights of self-organisation.’ China and India’s economic prowess diverged as recently as the late 1980s, as *The Economist* (2010c) notes ‘as recently as the early 1990s, India was as rich, in terms of national income per head. China then hurtled so far ahead that it seemed India could never catch up.’ That trajectory looks to be changing. In 2012 reports of a continued decline in Chinese manufacturing followed a wave of strikes and riots that began in 2010 (Barboza, 2012). As Eli Friedman (2012) commented, ‘by the end of the 2010, Chinese media commentators were

declaring that the era of low-wages had come to an end.’ This could have also been the beginning of capital flight out of China. A myriad of factors from legislative, economic and labour market changes have meant that transnational capital is now shifting manufacturing to more profitable environments. With its growing importance in the global economy the next choicest option after China is India (Frank 1998; Winters & Yusuf 2007) which is expected to outpace China’s aging labour force within the next two decades (Bloom 2011), making the surplus labour pool optimum for capital accumulation.

Some of the key criteria in factory site location include: labour costs and labour laws of country, urban population (or potential urban population) numbers, built-up infrastructure, existence of supplier factories, trade policies, GDP, government policy regarding FDI, the volatility of the exchange rate, and size of the local consumer market. Globalisation has meant that union density has fallen sharply everywhere (ILO 2000).

Strategies to establish workers’ rights in the garment sector under conditions of global capital hypermobility have found states and TNCs a historic obstacle. As will become clear from the cases outlined throughout this thesis successful campaigns by workers have both build on and broken from the established modes of anti-sweatshop campaigns, with worker self-organization and transnational links between workers across the world fundamental to their success.

This conceptual framework included history and theory to lay the foundation for the case studies. The five empirical chapters, following the next

chapter's discussion of methods, will explore the dynamics of the global garment production and the attempts by workers to build power within it.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

As previously stated, the central research question that I attempt to answer is: how do workers organize themselves to gain power in a sector that is as globally mobile as the garment sector? Each case approaches this question from different vantage points using their own distinct sets of data. The research methods should be understood in light of this question.

In this chapter, I explain and justify the methodological approach I have taken in researching the political, economic, and labour geography of the global garment sector. The methods I employ throughout the research are based on a series of empirical investigations at the transnational level as well as on my own involvement, which I will elucidate later in this chapter, with the International Union League for Brand Responsibility ('League'), and, at the local level, as a labour organizer assisting Bangalore's Garment And Textile Workers Union (GATWU). In this sense I was a participant observer in the struggles that are discussed in chapter 6 and 7. At a more general level the research – both its aims and its methods – comes out of my own experiences as a labour organizer in the United States for a three years while a part-time student during my undergraduate education as well as an activist in trade union struggles in Sri Lanka and in the UK. It is from these experiences that I began an inquiry into the organizing prospects and possibilities of workers in the Global South. Personal background experience and the knowledge that grows out of them, which can be found particularly in chapter 4, parts of chapter 5, and chapter 8, have been used as one of the primary sources of

material, though sparingly. Many of these experiences have been documented by my own email communication and reflection documents from activist colleagues and myself.

Throughout the research I employ a number of methods including semi-structured qualitative interviews, participant observation, secondary data, primary source data analysis and ethnography. In some of the research, specifically the cases based in Bangalore, I employ ethnographic methods. In the Bangalore-based research I take the ideas, testimony and actions of workers as the basis of the research. This makes my approach unlike many of the studies within economic geography, where researchers are often expected to choose between macroeconomic analysis and voices of individual or groups of workers, organising on the basis of class, gender or nationality. Every case in this thesis includes voices from workers, organizers, and union leaders, but also an analysis of how these workers inform changing formations of capital, the reconstitution of the city, or larger issues of labour struggle within the sector.

Qualitative methods have become the predominant practice within human geography (Hay, 2000) and within labour geography workers voices have tended to take a more dominant role. I employ what has come to be known as 'Emancipatory Action Research' in which workers' agency and aims become the understanding of the social and economic world and fundamental objectives of the research.

Case Study

My research design is a multiple case study approach. The case study method is an *intensive* approach which exams the world through in-depth study of a single 'case' which can be wide-ranging from an individual, to a city, policy, organization, event, etc. In the multiple case study approach, each case needs to be 'bounded' (Stake 1995) meaning each case needs to be separated by a particularly 'boundary' either in terms of space, time, physical separation, etc. Within this thesis chapters 4, 7, and 8 are 'bounded', examining a single workers' campaign against a single company as its case. Chapter 5 uses a campaign by a newly formed labour organisation as its case to explore the history of transnational collective bargaining in the garment sector and chapter 6 is a case of the Bangalore-based garment trade union GATWU and their attempts to build their organisational strength.

The multiple case study design allows the researcher to tackle a single question through multiple lenses, using different data sets, sites of exploration, and interview subjects in order to reveal the essence of a phenomenon and enhance data credibility (Stake 1995; Yin 2003). This approach applied within this research help sift and winnow in search of truths, and, in effect, reveals that the dynamics faced by garment workers are fundamentally similar while not blurring the very real differences between the diverse sites of production. The research within this thesis attempts to reveal the diversity of experiences, issues, and contestations within garment production rather than erase or silence them. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) maintain the relativity of truth, which is dependent on one's standpoint, thus the case study approach attempts to understand the working world from different vantage points as a method to

understand the 'how' and 'why' of workers' power within the global garment sector.

However, the case study approach is not without its limitations. Firstly, there are ethical questions of how the cases are selected and which elements are highlighted. As Guba and Lincoln (1981, 378) posit, 'an unethical case writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated.' It is true that there are large tracts of the world that have not been included within this research, which is clearly one of the limitations of a case study approach, although the careful selection and justification of comparative cases blunts this criticism. Additionally, as Hamel (1993, 23) points out there are serious concerns regarding generalizability, validity, and reliability, 'the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of representativeness...and its lack of rigor in the collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials...introduced by the subjectivity of the researcher and others involved in the case.' However, these kinds of critique could be applied to almost every qualitative research design. Indeed qualitative methods will never be as generalizable as large-n controlled randomised trials but the strength of the design is that it may bring out the explanation of the 'how' and 'why'.

Data Collection

I approach the field up close and from a distance through contacts on the ground, and by participation in global workers' campaigns. My contacts emerge from workers' struggle or global solidarity campaigns and are bound together

with my own decade-long history as an anti-sweatshop campaigner, first in the U.S. and then in the U.K. For example, within the first two empirical cases, in chapters 4 and 5, Honduras and global Jobbers' Agreement campaign are both based on these contacts developed through my own labour activism. Two of the five cases, chapters 6 and 7, occur through a series of research encounters with the residents in and around Bangalore over the course of two years, first from October 2012 to July 2013 and then a visit from September 2014 to December 2014.

Although each encounter, whether Honduras, China, or Bangalore, has its own narrative and perspective, they are threaded together by common struggles, experiences, workplaces, value chains, global buyers, competitive pressures and spatial relations of power. I employ methodologies that make the experiences of everyday people within an everyday context (work, housing, social care, etc.) central to extract 'real', rich, and detailed data. The purpose of the research is to juxtapose the general with the specific, the global with the local, to understand how individuals negotiate and carve out new vistas of resistance to hegemonic forces, to assist, in its own way, in amplifying the voices of the exploited, oppressed and dispossessed.

I chose the garment sector in part because it was a sector that I had already remained active in since 2004 where I had developed a number of contacts as an activist. But academically the sector's role as a 'starter industry' (Gereffi 1999) allows for prescient analysis of capitalist circulation and development. The sector also is situated at the intersection of gender and class in that it represents ostensibly 'masculine' manufacturing (rather than

'feminised' domestic work for example) while also remaining feminised throughout its entire trajectory. This allows for it to be analysed as a consistent industry demographically throughout much of its history regardless of its location. The appeal to study the sector also comes from its ever-expanding role across the Global South changing the built-environment, reconstituting capital-labour relations, and refitting the city for the purposes of capital accumulation. In this vein, my interest in the organisation of workers into militant democratic unions in the garment sector stems from my interest in the possibility for workers to fight for their emancipation, change the structures of power, and challenge the force of transnational capital. In its essence, the interest in the sector grows out of an evaluation of impact. As Hale and Wills (2005) point out, given the importance of clothing to the economy of the Global South, a large-scale reconfiguration of wealth in the sector would translate into considerable social and economic development with the potential for affect the lives of millions of worker and their families.

As a globally fluid sector with labour as its single most determinant variable it allows for an ease of comparisons between countries at a greater level than capital intensive production, public sector, or workers in natural resources extraction, which have a greater number of confounding variables in addition to labour. Although seemingly disparate the five cases are linked theoretically to the work of the newly formed International Union League for Brand Responsibility ('League'). The League's presence is felt in every case, though in some more than others.

In chapter 4 the contacts were formed through my involvement with the League. Chapter 5 is a more historic and in-depth look at the League and is the only case within the thesis that is centred almost entirely on the League's demands and historical formation. Chapter 6 dealt with a South Indian union whose ongoing international campaigns are deeply bound-up with the League and whose president Pratibha is also international vice-president of the League. And finally, chapter 7 and 8 highlight labour campaigns were heavily supported internationally by League affiliates and I developed contacts with Chinese activists primarily through the League's organizers.

Thus, the struggles at Yue Yuen in China, at Arvind Limited in India, for the global Jobbers' Agreement, and at Fruit of the Loom in Honduras were all connections formed through on-going involvement with the League. This involvement included weekly international conference calls, monthly executive board calls where I volunteered as a interpreter from Kannada into English, and as a prime contact in struggles particularly during my time in Bangalore. In addition, I organized fundraisers, writing reports, or providing other kinds of material support for League member unions throughout the course of my research and I continue to do so. In this sense my aim as a researcher was not only to extract knowledge to further my own academic career but to provide material solidarity, mutual aid, and support.

This strengthened my bonds with workers and the trade union who would share strategies and knowledge since they accurately understood that I was on their side. However, It quickly became evident to factory managers that I was simply a 'neutral' researcher in the classical sense. This made conducting

interviews with factory owners, managers, and the district labour representative increasingly difficult. Thus, when I was able to speak to some, outside of my role as an interpreter, with factory-side officials or workers the subjects were too guarded for the data to be usable.

Emancipatory Action Research

In practice, ethnography within my research serves primarily as a form of theory-formation and triangulation. My participation in the everyday directly informs the theory. Thus theory grows out of the empirical data. Although qualitative methods are not simply a means by which to gather facts, the point of knowledge entry here is key. The cases are based primarily on 'grounded theory', which takes the opposite approach to research processes by positivists. Rather than approaching the field with the purpose of proving a preexisting hypothesis, I approached the field with the hope of gaining knowledge about the world from workers themselves. I attempt to apply Louis Althusser's melding of theory and practice in what he calls 'theoretical practice' (2005) in to the 'real existing worker class' who are capable of formulating theory based on their own practice. This is methodological application of Antonio Gramsci's (1992) notion that the working class and struggle creates its own 'organic intellections'.

Geographic emancipatory action research stems from a particular strand of 'radical' geography and feminist research (McDowell 1992; Kitchin & Hubbard). To rephrase Marx, radical geographers resolved to not just observe and interpret the world, but to change it. By fusing together practice with

theory, or 'praxis', the research shifts away from abstract, disinterested areas and methods towards relevancy and a counter-hegemonic praxis. Richard Peet (1977, 2) claims that 'the radical geographer [should] reconsider the traditional ways in which we have looked at person-to-person relationships, social system-to-social system relationships, and social system-to-environment relationships. By reformulating these relationships, radical geography aspires to [assist in] the evolution of a non-destructive society.' Peet (1977, 3) goes on to suggest that much of radical geography found its place in studying the city, especially the contradictions between capitalist needs of the labour market and those of the housing market, and that 'such a radical conclusion is highly unusual in contemporary geography' and that 'conventional geographic theory has been so structured as to *avoid* such fundamental issues as class dominance and system contradiction.' Massey's (1973) critique of 'industrial location theory,' or indeed much of the Geographic field at the time, was to say that it was a derivative of neo-classical economic theory and underpinned the existing structures rather than adequately critique them.

Though there is a history of anarchist geographers, including Peter Kropotkin of the 19th century, geography through a revolutionary lens is a relative newcomer to the field. Most of what we now know to call 'Radical Geography' blossomed in the late 1960s, specifically in the United States, off the back movements for civil rights, women's liberation, and against the Vietnam War. Whilst the 1950s saw a resurgence of quantification in abstract spatial theory, the 1960s saw many young academics critique the status quo within Geography, alongside the ruptures of society.

Emancipatory action research does not endeavour towards ‘objectivity’ but is based on the assumption that researchers ‘are inevitably constitutive of the data they collect and the ways in which it is interpreted and analysed’ (Hall, 1996, 23). Whilst purely quantitative methods are more acceptable within the natural sciences, the reification, or treating subjective human experiences as objects, through a researcher’s ‘neutral’ position ‘fail(s) to show their human influence in the process of selecting, interpreting, analysing and reporting data’ (Ibid.). Action research is a reflexive process that starts by being self-conscious, and recognises the researcher’s existing knowledge and principles, pre-existing experiences and a priori views.

Rohini Hensman (2011, 15), who uses the ‘emancipatory research methods’ in her own research, situates the position of the scholar within Gramscian (1992) process of working class reflection, innovations carried forward by new ‘organic’ intellectuals emerging from the working class *as well as* by likeminded ‘traditional’ intellectuals, concluding ‘in many ways, this cycle of struggle, reflection on experience, trying out new strategies, and once again reflecting on them resembles emancipatory action research in its dialectical interweaving of thought and practice.’

The methods I employ are as diverse as the vantage points of investigation of each chapter. The research is also grounded in my experience as an organizer in the campaigns itself. Chapter 4 grows out of my involvement with the Fruit of Loom international solidarity campaign to break Russell Athletic contracts at universities. Chapter 5 is based on my background in the anti-sweatshop movement and my ongoing involvement within the League.

Chapter 6 was developed out of my participant observation with GATWU in and around Bangalore while I assisting the union organise new worksites. Similarly, chapter 7 is based on ethnographic research at a garment warehouse facility outside of Bangalore in a town called Ramnagara conducted on and off at two separate periods over two years. I was able to negotiate access as an interpreter for the union between international investigating organisation, one that I had worked with for nearly a decade, and workers within the factory, affording me unprecedented entry that greatly assisting the research. Finally, chapter 8 is based on my own record of involvement in the international solidarity campaign targeting Adidas and interviews with China-based activists that developed out of that campaign.

Scholar-Activist Research

Within geography scholarship there has been longstanding debates over researcher subjectivity and has been particularly pronounced within discussions of works on activism and social movements. Chatterton, Hodkinson, Pickerill (2010) maintain that the ascendancy of neo-liberal globalisation saw the retrenchment of spaces of scholar activism. However, in recent years a new generation of geographers have brought to the fore questions of the 'public', 'activism', and 'participation'. There is a growing desire to fuse academic work with political goals that highlight the social movements and struggles of the subaltern.

Scholar-activist research inevitably carries its own tensions, contradictions, and ethical quandaries and my research is no exception but

approaching the field as an activist assists in understanding the development of strategies that transform power relations rather than my role helping reinforce them. This is not to say that non-activist research always reinforces existing power relations, but that one method to mitigate this dilemma is through by providing support where able.

A reflection of researcher positionality also remains central to the analysis. When addressing sensitive issues around gender, particularly working with female participants as a male researcher, scholars have noted that semi-structured interviews are an effective tool for interviewees to discuss the complexity that intersects power, gender and class (DeVault and Gross 2006). As a Western-born man of Indian ancestry a reflection of my own positionality becomes essentially not only in building trusted relationships with participants but in order to effectively analyse the data. Approaching the field as activist allows for those bonds to take shape, mutual respect to develop, and a more honest flow of information from researcher to participant and participant to researcher.

I found that these relationships were most effective in understanding deeply personal reflections of the predominantly female participants within my area and research. It opened up an opportunity to confront dominant members of groups on gender and other forms of power politics. I remained careful to calculate the degree to which I could approach the interviewee in order to tease out their thoughts on questions of power, oppression, and liberation within the workplace and at home. This is especially the case in chapter 6.

The primary data for the analysis was generated through 64 semi-structured interviews most were included in the thesis [see appendix for interview log] some were not. Interviews were the primary method for data gathering. The interviews in and around Bangalore were conducted in Kannada, which I recorded, then translated and transcribed simultaneously into English. While most interviews were comprehensive, such as those done with trade union leaders, some interviews conducted with those who participated focused on a the thoughts of specific events such as a strike or other workplace actions.

All the campaigns within the research were on going in varying degrees. For example the case in chapter 4, the campaign in Honduras, was finishing its collective bargaining negotiations so therefore almost complete whereas cases such as the League's campaign in chapter 5 or the cases at Arvind and Yue Yuen, chapters 7 and 8, were still live. Thus, many of those interviewed, especially in these cases, asked to remain anonymous. The interviews were conducted with labour organizers, anti-sweatshop activists in the US and Europe, and workers in Cambodia, China, Honduras, with a majority of interviews conducted in and around Bangalore, India. Interviews in India were conducted in-person while others were conducted over the phone or with the assistance of third-party interpreters. Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours.

Chapter Methods

Each case/chapter/paper utilises its own methodological approach. I will discuss the different methods taken in each case, which were primarily based on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, secondary data, and primary source documents.

IV Stitching Together

Choloma is located in San Pedro Sula in Puerto Cortez in the Northeast of Honduras (Figure 3.1). This paper was written with the assistance of an El Salvador-based labour organizer, Jack Mahoney, who was the lead organizer of the international campaign as a former staffer for the organization, United Students Against Sweatshops. Additionally, I was an activist in the international campaign to assist the workers at Fruit of the Loom in the struggle highlighted in this case. Our experiences assisted in gaining a close knowledge of the campaign and strengthening a number of significant contacts. Within the chapter a primary source of data are the multiple reports compiled by the independent monitoring organisation the Workers' Rights Consortium (WRC). The WRC reports alongside interviews that were conducted with key trade union activists in person by Jack Mahoney. The trade union leaders were chosen based on their roles within the campaign at Fruit of the Loom through our first-hand knowledge of the campaign, as well as their elected leadership in the trade union.

Figure 3.1



V A Global Contract to End Sweatshops

This chapter primarily critiqued ‘institutional’ efforts to establish collective bargaining within the garment sector, highlight an emerging ‘participatory’ approach, as well as analysing some of the history of garment worker activism within the domestic sphere. For the history in the domestic production I relied heavily on an interview I conducted with Jeff Hermanson who was the former organizing director of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), currently works with the North American union Workers’ United, and is heavily involved with the League.

In order to analyse the efficacy of the International Framework Agreements I conducted interviews with a trade unionist from TEKSIF in Turkey over the phone and with C.CAWDU in Cambodia with the assistance of a League labour organizer on the ground in Cambodia, Liana Dalton. I chose to

speak to leaders from these unions since they are affiliated to the Global Union Federation IndustriALL, whose IFAs I critique within the chapter. TEKSIF and C.CAWDU in particular are touted as successful applications of the IFAs.

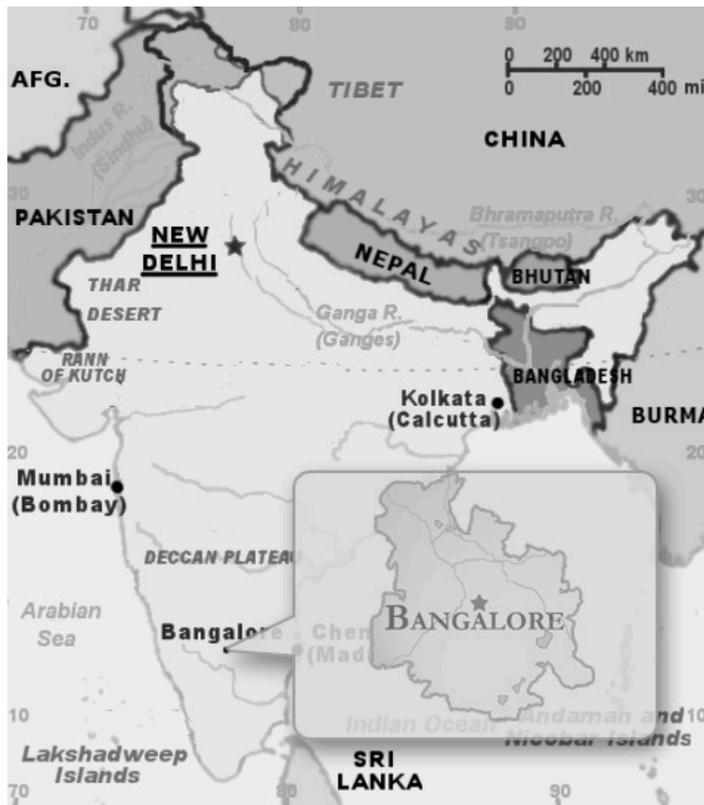
Finally, the chapter included interviews with member of the League who gave insights on how it would function in practice. As an organiser in the campaign I included discussion over its legality, which were observed in the meetings of a team from Yale Law School. In addition to interviews I used primary sources of ILGWU leaflets, court and legislative documents to draw the similarities and differences between the Jobbers' Agreements championed by the ILGWU and the global Jobbers' Agreement being pursued today by the League.

VI Interwoven Threads:

This chapter is based primarily on field research in Bangalore conducted as a participant observer at the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2014. Located in the South Indian state of Karnataka, Bangalore (Figure 3.2) is the third most populous city in India and the case study focused on an analysis of the historical geography of Bangalore and the efforts by the Garment And Textile Workers' Union (GATWU) to organize and build their trade union within the export-oriented garment sector.

Interviews in this chapter were wide-ranging. Many of the interviews were conducted with independent garment workers, GATWU staff, and GATWU members, but also with other workers such as ex-textile mill workers, security guards, and leaders from other trade unions. Many of these other trade union leaders brought important insights and were particularly critical of GATWUs strategies. Finally, I filed a number of Freedom of Information requests with the state government to gain access to legal documents related to court cases.

Figure 3.2



VII Cotton Field to Retail Rack

Chapter 7 focuses on a case from a workers' struggle at a warehouse in Ramnagara, a city located in the southeast corner of the state of Karnataka (figure 3.3), an hour east of Bangalore. The case is based on participant observation conducted from November 2012 to March 2013 and then from October to December 2014. Interviews were primarily with GATWU-affiliated workers at Arvind who were leading the campaign, but I also through a series of events I was given unique access to interviews with management, management-side workers, and a senior executive at Arvind.

At the end of 2012 as GATWU leaders in Ramnagara were being targeted for violence by management-side workers and security guards, and in one particularly brutal attack, which I witnessed, a worker was severely beaten and rushed to the hospital. After joining workers to the hospital and then to the

police station I was followed and verbally threatened by a number of management-side workers. I recorded and reported these threats to an international monitoring organization that I had developed close ties with through my previous anti-sweatshop activism. The organization was given access to the site at the request of the brand, PVH, to conduct an independent investigation. The organization asked if I could be the interpreter from Kannada to English, since the only other person fluent in Kannada was the PVH representative. For three days I translated interviews with senior management, dozens of workers, and an executive from Arvind. I collected a sizeable amount of useful data from these days as an interpreter however since it was gathered covertly I chose not to use any of it directly in the chapter. However, I did gain invaluable theoretical insights that I applied to the chapter; in particular I noticed the relative powerlessness of the PVH representative vis-à-vis the Arvind executive. These personal dynamics prompted my interest in to examining the changing relationship between buyers and producers, which informed the cases with chapter 7 and 8.

Figure 3.3



(Source: Karnataka Travel Bureau)

VIII Consolidation within the Garment Sector and its Prospects for Labour

The final chapter looks at the strike in Guangdong Province in China located along the Southeast seaboard near Macau and Hong Kong (Figure 3.4). My connection to the Yue Yuen strike as one of the coordinators of the international solidarity campaign, in particular at Adidas storefront actions in London, Oxford and Manchester, but which took place in over a dozen cities around the world. This was organized through the League and my assistance was as an organizer with them. The chapter is based on news reports, data retrieved from Yue Yuen's own company reports and public filings, as well as three interviews with labour activists who were involved in supporting the workers at Yue Yuen. I was able to make connections with these activists through contacts with the League and build a degree of trust with them based on my work on the international solidarity campaign.

Figure 3.4



(Source: Zhanjiang Environmental Protections Agency)

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Chapter 4: Stitching Together

How Workers are Hemming Down Transnational Capital in the Hyper-Global Apparel Industry

Fatal disasters in Bangladesh garment factories demand we learn from recent anti-sweatshop breakthroughs. Beginning in 2007, workers at Fruit Of The Loom (FOTL) factories in Honduras built a uniquely successful global campaign. FOTL closed a factory and laid off 1,200 workers in response to workers' efforts to improve working conditions, a textbook move in the industry's "race to the bottom." But nine months later, after the largest collegiate boycott in history, FOTL reopened the factory and extended union neutrality to all its Honduran factories. We argue that the campaign, which resulted in a reversal of the transnational's decision to abandon the unionized factory and the direct negotiation between FOTL top executives and workers, provides an unprecedented model for labour to rein in the apparel industry's hyper-mobile capital. Since their negotiated agreement with FOTL, workers have won significant improvements in wages and working conditions, and inspired groundbreaking new campaigns to challenge the transnationals whose products they assemble.

Keywords: unions, garments, international solidarity, anti-sweatshop, Fruit Of The Loom, Honduras

On⁸ May 4, 2013, the *New York Times* wrote:

Hundreds of women and men have been burned, suffocated and crushed to death in recent years as [Bangladesh]'s garment industry has boomed, with Western clothing brands and retailers making a big shift to Bangladesh from China, where labour costs are rising. ... What is needed is direct action by international companies to improve working conditions for the more than 3.5 million Bangladeshi workers — 80 percent of them women — who toil in clothing factories. ... Big garment buyers like Walmart, H&M and Gap have tremendous power to improve conditions in that market.

For the first time since the 1990s, a devastating tragedy has brought the conditions of garment workers back to mainstream media spotlight. Rana Plaza, an eight-story building in the Savar District of Dhaka, Bangladesh, was

⁸ A version of this paper was presented jointly at the 2013 North American Labour History Conference. We are particularly grateful to Jane Collins, Craig Jeffrey, Linda McDowell, Richard Appelbaum, Garrett Shishido Strain, Teresa Cheng, Joel Feingold, Jonah Zinn and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

one of the world's 300,000 sites of outsourced garment production for major transnational brands (Miller 2008). At 9am on the 24th of April, as over 3,000 workers worked, Rana Plaza collapsed, quickly becoming the deadliest garment factory disaster in history. By the time the rubble had cleared the death count stood at 1,129. After two decades of varied efforts intended to root out rampant violations of workers' rights in the industry – by companies, labour, governments and advocacy groups – Rana Plaza has come to symbolize the utter failure to restrain an endless downward spiral of garment workers' power and welfare globally known as the “race to the bottom.” In fact, while the garment sector remains “essentially unchanged” after twenty years of anti-sweatshop efforts (Anner, Bair, and Blasi 2012, 2), garment worker wages in real terms fell between 2001 and 2011 in most producing countries (WRC 2013a). As Ballinger (2009) states, it is as if “nearly twenty years of anti-sweatshop activism has come to naught.”

The Rana disaster followed a series of deadly tragedies at export-processing factories that epitomize the severe shortcomings of the existing regime of labour rights compliance. At least 262 garment workers died and another 600 were seriously injured when Pakistan's Ali Enterprises caught ablaze in September 2012, just a month after an inspection by a for-hire auditor earned the factory a widely-respected but corporate-backed Social Accountability International accreditation (AFL-CIO 2013; Walsh and Greenhouse 2012). Between 2010 and 2012, inhumane working conditions drove workers at Apple suppliers Foxconn and Foxlink to commit suicide, even after the iconic iPhone brand began funding controversial Fair Labour Association to

investigate its contract suppliers (Nova and Shapiro 2012). In a morbid metaphor for the failure to deal with root causes, Foxconn addressed the mass worker suicides by installing nets to catch workers who, in desperation, attempted to jump to their death.

Today the apparel industry's dominant approach to labour compliance centres on "social auditing" inspections conducted by transnational brands and for-hire monitoring groups, evaluating working conditions against "codes of conduct" often written by the same Transnational Corporations (TNCs)⁹. As early as 1992, when the *Washington Post* documented the case of Chinese prison labour in the production of Levi jeans, Levi Strauss responded by becoming one of the first brands to introduce codes of conduct for all their suppliers (A. Hale and Shaw 2001), and other brands quickly followed suit.

From the beginning, there was skepticism towards the auditing regime underpinned by codes of conduct. Robert Reich, US Labour Secretary at the time said, "codes are not a panacea, no code is worth the paper it's printed on without strict enforcement of its requirements." Michael Hansenne, International Labour Organization (ILO) Director General, stated that, "while these initiatives may be well-meaning, there remains no system to ensure that corporations which are fuelling the integration of the global economy respect international labour rights" (Collymore 1997). Despite these lucid early criticisms, Hansenne's statement still rings true nearly two decades later.

⁹ There is a vast and growing body of literature that has identified governance measures under different labels, among them "soft law" (Kumar 2013), "outsourced regulation" (O'Rourke 2003), "self-regulation" (Blackett 2000), "privatized regulation" (AFL-CIO 2013), "governance" (Hassel 2008; Levy and Prakash 2003) as well as an "auditing regime" (Locke et al. 2012). We see "auditing" as predicated on self-regulation by TNCs, and a subset of global governance.

The auditing regime relies on the dubious commitment of TNCs to police their own production networks, a core tenet of so-called “corporate social responsibility”, or CSR (Devinney 2009). Wary of this conflict of interest, advocates created parallel structures that gave institutions like US universities a role in the policing, but left the auditing regime itself intact. Universities adopted their own codes of conduct, seeking the disclosure of supplier factories from brands, and requiring independent monitoring as a requisite part of the tendering process for apparel purchasing or licensing contracts. At best the system is reactive: workers and advocates used the codes of conduct in the public sphere to embarrass TNCs into remedying specific labour violations that had already taken place (Anner et al 2012). But a recent study refuses to concede even that ground, claiming the “CSR industry has been bad for working people” (see AFL-CIO 2013). The report found that twenty years of codes, audits, and other CSR initiatives in the garment sector are a façade, and have succeeded largely in providing public relations cover for depressed wages and deteriorating factory conditions that have cost thousands of lives in the sector.

Decades earlier, labour unions in the US had power to enforce agreements with both employers and apparel brands, as we will discuss shortly. Today workers and their unions have no formal power of enforcement in the auditing regime (Wright 1993). Despite the search for a viable solution to boost garment workers’ structural power, the wages, conditions, and strength of workers in the sector has greatly diminished with accelerated global mobility and subcontracting (Greven 2008; ILO 2000; AFL-CIO 2013).

Although the Rana disaster has sparked a new concern about the dark side of globalised capital, many are unfamiliar with the recent trajectory of the ever-evolving anti-sweatshop efforts by workers and advocates, the lessons learned, and the small but groundbreaking victories that illuminate new ways forward. While there is broad recognition of a failure of the industry's auditing regime, there is little clarity on the crucial question of where the anti-sweatshop movement must go from here¹⁰. The most commonly proposed solutions regarding worker safety in Bangladesh simply create new auditing regimes, potentially doubling down on the errors of the past without directly addressing the overwhelming imbalance of structural power between workers and TNCs. The most recent incarnation of the auditing regime is the Accord on Factory and Building Safety in Bangladesh ("Accord"), which is undergirded by a system of independent inspections (*see AFBSB 2013*).

We argue that the Accord, while narrow in its scope, is a historic step towards returning legally-binding responsibility to outsourcing apparel TNCs for working conditions at contract factories, with some unions even in a position to litigate to enforce the TNCs' responsibility. However, insofar as such an approach conforms to the existing auditing regime, it will fall short without successes by workers in strategically important TNCs production networks to form union organizations that reclaim workers' position in directly negotiating and enforcing their labour conditions with the TNCs. Historically, non-union workers are far less likely to blow the whistle on violations due to a very real

¹⁰ One of the proposed solutions is the International Framework Agreements (IFA). Within the garment sector the only IFA is with apparel TNC Inditex, IFAs have been critiqued for being non-binding, largely unenforceable, and lacking a democratic mandate (*see Croucher and Cotton 2009; Miller 2004; Papadakis 2011*)

fear of reprisals (Barnett 1992), union members are more likely to identify problems with safety and demand solutions (*see* Weil 1992), and as a result unionized factories are proven safer (Grunberg 1983).

Lance Compa (2013) argues that the Rana disaster “should be a pivot point for the global apparel industry,” but cautions against repeating the consumer-dependent strategies of the past. Instead, he urges for “demands for change [to] start to focus on workers’ right to form trade unions.” After arguing for strengthening Bangladeshi workers’ unions, Compa points to a union victory in Honduras by workers of Fruit of the Loom:

The Kentucky-based company reopened the factory where the union dispute arose, rehired all employees, recognized the union and entered into good-faith bargaining. Now the renamed “New Day” facility has a collective bargaining agreement with higher wages, better conditions, and a strong health and safety committee. Workers have maintained high productivity levels, and the company has added employees.

On November 14th, 2009, Fruit of the Loom (FOTL), the largest exporter of t-shirts to the US market in the world and the largest private sector employer in Honduras (Doh and Dahan 2010; Anner 2013), announced it would reopen its garment factory Jerzees de Honduras (JDH), under the name Jerzees Nuevo Dia (JND), or “New Day”. The final deal, negotiated between FOTL workers and executives, included the rehiring of 1,200 employees, a multi-million dollar payout to workers, and a commitment to extend union neutrality and access across its Honduran supply chain. This case tells the unique story of a TNC that shut down a garment factory in retaliation to workers forming a union – as so

often happens¹¹ – only to reverse that decision and fundamentally change its approach to labour relations. Workers’ successful unionizing campaign overcame firings, death threats and nine months of unemployment, all whilst maintaining a highly participatory union structure to win impressive wage and benefit improvements, creating political space for a wave of worker organizing in Honduras and beyond.

During the campaign, workers’ allies in the US, UK, and Canada persuaded as many as 132 universities¹² to boycott FOTL’s subsidiary Russell Athletic, costing the company over \$50 million (Davis 2010). The campaign became the largest collegiate boycott of a single company since the movement against South African apartheid, and the largest of an apparel brand in history¹³. The culmination of a long-term strategy on US campuses, it was heralded as the student anti-sweatshop movement’s “biggest victory so far” by *The New York Times*’ Stephen Greenhouse (2009). Organizers later declared that it was the first time in the modern anti-sweatshop movement that “a factory that was shut down to eliminate a union was later re-opened after a worker-activist campaign” and the “first company-wide neutrality agreement in the history of the Central America apparel export industry” (Doh and Dahan 2010).

The victory came despite challenges. A military coup ousted labour-friendly Honduran President Jose Manuel Zelaya shortly after FOTL shut down

¹¹ For more detailed history and case studies of such closings in Latin America see Armbruster-Sandoval (2004).

¹² This includes all the universities that participated in the boycott by either cutting, suspending, or, in cases where the university currently had no business relationship with FOTL, publicly agreeing to withhold orders until remediation.

¹³ Comparison by value of contracts lost, based on interviews with former and current leaders of various anti-sweatshop and labour union organizations including USAS, the former UNITE! and the WRC.

the JDH factory. The 2008 financial crisis gave FOTL a plausible justification to close a factory; despite repeat findings by labour watchdogs that the closure was intended to jettison trade union activity. The factory had recently changed hands with the 2006 purchase of Russell Athletic by FOTL; itself owned by Berkshire Hathaway, the holding company led by Warren Buffett, then the world's wealthiest person.

A critical examination of the precedent-setting advances at FOTL – and related breakthroughs that followed – will assist in developing ideas around power building, international campaigning, and the establishment of workers' rights in the clothing commodity chain. We begin by situating the FOTL campaign within the history of anti-sweatshop efforts in the garment sector. We then explore the theoretical and strategic implications of the FOTL campaign, two other campaigns that followed shortly, and a new organizing initiative by workers from a dozen countries in Asia and the Americas to directly confront apparel TNCs.

Historical Context

For a century, outsourcing has remained the main structural dilemma for garment workers. A New York's dressmakers' union pamphlet ("Why This Strike" 1936) urged its members to strike, declaring: 'The union announces simply and straightforwardly that the insanity of the unrestrained jobber-contractor system cannot be permitted to continue unchecked.'

In those days, outsourcing apparel companies were called "jobbers," as they decided which factories would get the job of making their products. A 1951 report commissioned by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union

(ILGWU) (Schlesinger 1951) argues that outsourcing drives down wages and causes chaotic instability for workers. In an anecdote that rings true today, the pamphlet explains how brands drive the race to the bottom:

A certain large jobber ... had 55 contractors working for him. Twelve of these were regularly employed and produced 85% of his production. The other 43 received 15% of his production and the signal honor of being used as a club to beat down price for all. Lest this seem an extreme example, a group of 81 jobbers was studied. Here it was found that 37% of the contractors handled 78% of the work, while the other 63% handled 22%.

To rein in the chaos, the dressmakers demanded a “limitation of contractors,” later called “designation of contractors” by the ILGWU. Following a number of mass strikes, the unions successfully forced many brands to exclusively do business with designated suppliers – unionized factories where brands agreed to pay a price high enough to guarantee fair wages to workers and reasonable profit to owners (Anner et al 2012). This was enshrined in “jobber agreements” negotiated between workers’ unions and the brands, despite having no direct employment relationship. The necessity for direct engagement between brands and unions was so evident that in 1959 the US Congress passed a labour law amendment allowing garment workers to picket and boycott the brands despite having no direct employment relationship¹⁴ (Previant 1959).

However, global trade deregulation of the 1990s exacerbated the garment workers’ structural disadvantage rooted in global outsourcing that had begun in the 1960s. The profound changes in spatial relations exacerbated the

¹⁴ Then- Massachusetts Senator John F Kennedy spoke in favour of the amendment, known as the Garment Industry Proviso, an exception to the “hot cargo” prohibition that prohibits picketing or boycotting secondary targets, a legacy that continues today.

power imbalance: When a brand pulled out of a union factory in New York City and gave the work to a non-union factory in Jersey City, the unionists would drive through the Holland Tunnel to go picket the factory and recruit its workers¹⁵. But when brands started sending the work to Santo Domingo and Jakarta, unionists could not keep up. While corporate executives had the resources to travel and communicate fluidly across borders, workers faced major obstacles in globalising their movement, not least of which was the lack of functioning global union alliances (Stavis and Boswell 2008). The benefits and enforcement structures that US unionists had built over many decades were designed to fit within US borders, and a nationalistic protectionist instinct among some union leaders precluded an aggressive plan to overcome the geographical, legal, linguistic and cultural divisions among the industry's new global workforce (Hensman 2011). Rather than a deepening of class consciousness and proletarian internationalism due to homogenized conditions, US workers often reacted with xenophobia, such as "anti-China" campaigns, tailored to maintain the US' global hegemony (Silver and Arrighi 2009). Garment workers' structural power was effectively wound backwards one hundred years, setting the stage for a severe backslide in working conditions.

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) was born out of the labour movement's search for a foothold as the floor fell out from under them.

USAS was conceived in 1997 by student activists working with the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE!), a successor to the

¹⁵ Based on interview with former ILGWU organizing director Jeff Hermanson – August 23, 2013

ILGWU. The aim of USAS was to leverage the \$4bn university apparel market – in which brands get licenses from universities who collect royalties for the sale of apparel bearing their names and logos, totaling between one and two percent of total US clothing sales overall (Krupat 2002). USAS claimed 150 chapters across the US with students supporting far-away labour struggles by leveraging universities' licensing agreements with transnational apparel brands and the codes of conduct therein (USAS 2013).

Around the time of USAS' birth, the Clinton administration's Secretary of Labour Robert Reich formed the Apparel Industry Partnership (AIP). Reich had been campaigning domestically against sweatshops, and the establishment of AIP set into motion the creation of the Fair Labour Association (FLA) to monitor apparel manufacturing. TNCs were quick to fund the FLA and publicize their own codes of conduct, while union partners such as UNITE and the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union left the FLA shortly after its formation (Chatterji and Levine 2005). Student activists soon realized that codes were hollow without a truly independent third party monitoring of factory conditions. The FLA became, what Ross (2006, 52) calls, "the exemplar of an approach to fighting labour abuse known as Corporate Social Responsibility," asserting that such initiatives along with the FLA itself are "almost useless." Ross continues: "workers rarely know the codes exist, contractors evade the standards with relative impunity and lie to auditors, remediation of violations is slow, and violations are not public knowledge except as generalizations." A global industry of for-hire auditors and accounting firms sprung up responding

to a burgeoning market in factory investigations, each with varying methodology and credibility.

Critical of the FLA and rejecting CSR, USAS activists called for the formation of an independent monitoring organization, and in 2000 formed the Workers' Rights Consortium (WRC), pressuring their universities to join and fund it. By 2005, student campaigns had ensured that over 170 universities had affiliated to the WRC, funding full-time factory investigators around the world. While major apparel transnationals were funders and board members of the FLA, the governing body of the WRC was university administrators, labour experts, and USAS activists. The WRC conducted independent unannounced investigations, publishing entire reports working in conjunction with workers on the shop floor; while the FLA contracted external monitors publishing only report summaries with little transparency as to whether workers were contacted at all (Chatterji and Levine 2005).

Soon it was apparent that the WRC auditing regime, too, was insufficient (Bartley 2009). When workers overcame the considerable challenges to organizing a union or remedying a major labour violation, they would either be fired, brands would "cut and run," the factory would close, or some combination of these outcomes. With precious few exceptions, campaigns ended with unionists losing their jobs and TNCs denying responsibility, regardless of how scathing the report or how thorough the investigation. Two major campaigns illustrated this point. Since 1998, US unions and other anti-sweatshop organizations like USAS and WRC repeatedly

intervened in support of workers organizing at the BJ&B factory in the Dominican Republic, successfully pressuring brands Nike and Reebok to reverse illegal firings of unionists. In a historic victory, the BJ&B union became the first in its country's free trade zones to win a collective bargaining agreement (Esbenshade 2008). But as workers finally won concrete improvements, the factory gradually laid off workers due to the brands shifting productions to cheaper alternatives. The brands washed their hands of the affair even as their production shifts eventually forced the factory to close. Meanwhile, the unionized Hermosa Manufacturing factory in El Salvador abruptly closed in 2005, stealing an estimated \$825,000 it owed to workers, and those who organized and demanded their compensation were blacklisted at other factories, while the brands Adidas, Nike and Russell Athletic insisted they could do nothing to remedy the situation. University of Wisconsin student Jan Van Tol (Sexauer 2007) told the university newspaper, "If Adidas' system requires this long to resolve even such an obvious case of labour rights violations as Hermosa, that system is obviously broken." The system was indeed broken, and activists were already proposing an overhaul.

In 2005, USAS, the WRC and several universities launched an ambitious new campaign for the Designated Suppliers Program (DSP). The DSP echoed UNITE!'s jobber agreements and the 1936 dressmakers' demand for "limitation of contractors," but would make universities the enforcer instead of unions themselves. The program would have universities require apparel brands to produce at least 75% of clothing bearing the university's logo in factories where workers had a democratic trade union and earned a living wage. USAS

representatives fanned out around the world to meet with garment unionists to develop the strategy.

Given the near-complete absence of qualified factories, universities' DSP would have to rely on the logic of "if you build it, they will come." By the 2007 closure of BJ&B, the Dominican factory was one of only five on the list of potential DSP-qualified factories¹⁶. Prospects for DSP were looking grim. Besides the basic logistical obstacle of an ever-shrinking list of worthy factories in which to implement the DSP, the program's opponents alleged antitrust violations, halting the process while activists awaited a review by the US Department of Justice (DOJ)¹⁷. TNCs continued fleeing from union factories, the race to the bottom continued downward unabated, and so far workers had failed to stop it. The era of jobber agreements, where workers were central to negotiating and enforcing contracts with both employers and brands, had virtually disappeared. The new regime of auditing and codes of conduct left workers without a direct relationship with apparel TNCs, and prospects to repair the divide looked dim.

In 2007, precisely in this moment of the movement's nadir, a group of women in Choloma, Honduras, frustrated with their working conditions, decided to form a union despite being aware that the odds were stacked against them. Together with their coworkers, they would reanimate the tradition of direct negotiations between garment workers and TNC executives, revealing the capacity for workers to reverse global capital flows away from union

¹⁶ Taken from a September 2006 memo by the DSP Working Group.

¹⁷ The DOJ eventually approved DSP in 2011 (USJD 2011)

factories, thereby striking a historic blow to labour's key obstacles in confronting globalised capital.

Despite this impact, only two academic articles have addressed the FOTL campaign. The first is a working paper by Doh and Dahan (2010) that gives a general overview of students' role in the FOTL campaign and compares it with the student campaign to divest from Sudan to protest human rights violations in Darfur. The second is a book chapter from Mark Anner (2013). Building on this work, we assess the campaign itself, its meaning for the structural power of workers to negotiate better terms and conditions, and its implications for the next chapter of the anti-sweatshop movement.

Our methods are founded on standpoint theory to establish a researchers' viewpoint to circumvent the social construction and neoliberal consensus while remaining robust. Popularized by feminist researchers, *standpoint* accepts the normative reality of the researcher but does not see the normative and explanatory facets as mutually exclusive. Within the feminist context it is a means of circumventing the gendered conceptions of knowledge, subject, inquiry and justification (Smith 1996; Jagger 2004; Wylie 2004). Standpoint theory has since been incorporated into research into race (Chang 1993), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) studies (Demo and Allen) and social work research . Our standpoint is as activists enmeshed within the movement of the FOTL campaign¹⁸. We write as both researcher and activist and such a position does not undermine supposed objective criterion,

¹⁸ Mahoney was a fulltime organizer for the campaigns at USAS and Kumar assisted the campaign in Europe.

beginning with the assumption that when writing within and about a social movement, conducting detached “objective” research is impossible.

Methods include semi-structured interviews with workers and organizers in Honduras and the United States, as well as primary source data extracted from union notes, campaign emails, internal documents, collective bargaining agreements, and labour contracts. Union organizing efforts in the global garment industry have few, if any, real successes, which is one explanation for the dearth of research in the area. Thus, to use a spatial metaphor, we are scouting territory with little previous exploration, even groping our way around in the dark.

Victory at Fruit of the Loom and Beyond¹⁹

Reyna Dominguez worked at Jerzees de Honduras (JDH), in Choloma, the heart of the country’s export-processing region. She sewed hooded sweatshirts that were trucked an hour north to the Caribbean port of Cortés, where they were shipped to the US, often to universities, logos emblazoned. Production of exports for the US, especially apparel, was on the rise in Choloma following the 2004 signing of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA).

One afternoon in the summer of 2007, Dominguez and four other JDH workers walked into the Choloma office of a union confederation called the *Central General de Trabajadores* (CGT). They described their situation to

¹⁹ Sources here include author’s interview Aug. 31, 2013 with Reyna Dominguez supplemented by information sourced from WRC (2007), Nova (2008), and AFL-CIO (2012)

Evangelina Argueta, coordinator of the CGT's union organizing in the *maquilas* – export-oriented assembly plants. Together the women made plans to build a strong union of JDH workers, despite the well-known threat of harassment, retaliatory dismissals, and blacklisting.

Dominguez and her coworkers were not the only FOTL workers organizing. At nearby Jerzees de Choloma (JDC), workers began forming a union in March 2007 and soon affiliated with the CGT. And in May 2007, workers at Petralex, a contract factory producing for FOTL, had organized their own union and joined the CGT.

By July of 2007, managers at all three factories unlawfully dismissed union leaders and members. JDC fired almost all seventy-two founding union members, Petralex fired all six union officers, and JDH fired twenty-five unionists. By October, 145 workers had been unlawfully dismissed for union activity at JDC and JDH. The union filed a complaint with the local labour ministry and alerted international organizations²⁰. The WRC investigated and published reports. In turn, students put pressure on universities to leverage their multimillion-dollar contracts to pressure FOTL to rehire the workers. Though many unionists were re-hired, FOTL soon announced plans to close JDC in July 2008. In talks with the unions and WRC, the company agreed to transfer the fired JDC unionists to JDH, offering priority hiring at JDH for JDC workers after the latter closed.

²⁰ Honduran labour law is rarely enforced, a common practice in export-oriented countries. For more detailed analysis on labour law, state and international capital see Hensman (2011).

Meanwhile, Dominguez and her fellow unionists at JDH pressed forward with organizing. On July 11, 2008, the union began negotiations with local management over a collective bargaining agreement. Negotiations reached an impasse on October 3, 2008, after management had been unwilling to budge on crucial issues like wage raises. Under Honduran law, this meant FOTL would be obliged to submit to a mediation process at the local Labour Ministry. Instead, on Wednesday, October 8, 2008, FOTL announced it would close JDH, then its only unionized factory.

The factory closed on January 31, 2009. The following day, union leaders Moises Montoya and Norma Chavarria were at the University of Maryland, kicking off the first of various tours coordinated with USAS. The workers stated their clear objective: to leverage economic power over FOTL via universities, retailers, shareholders and other business partners, until the company re-opened the factory and finish negotiating with the union over working conditions²¹.

The “Rein in Russell” campaign that followed²² lasted from January to October of 2009. The college boycott began to snowball as the union leaders spoke at public events organized by USAS activists, meeting with university administrators to convince them to terminate licensing contracts. Combining an “air” and “ground” strategy²³, workers met with members of the US

²¹ Informed by interview with Dominguez who went on a separate 2009 campaign tour in the UK.

²² See Anner (2013) for a detailed account of the campaign.

²³ Derived from military terminology, union campaigns often distinguish “air war” tactics like pressuring an employer via its clients to the “ground war” that centres on mobilizing workers

Congress²⁴, travelled to the Omaha headquarters of Berkshire Hathaway, and joined USAS activists to distribute leaflets at retail stores selling FOTL products. While activists expanded the leafleting activities across the country, JC Penney immediately informed the campaigners they would no longer sell FOTL products. Doug Morton, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the retail chain Sports Authority, met with activists in Colorado in April 2008, and soon after announced they would no longer stock FOTL. The Honduran workers' local union struggle had now become a comprehensive strategy focused on university licensing contracts, retail outlets, and even the National Basketball Association's (NBA) relationship with FOTL subsidiary Spalding. The campaign was an all-out assault on company's profits.

Notwithstanding the crucial strategic role played by USAS and other organizations, the Honduran union leaders remained the protagonists of the campaign, not limited to the role of a mere messenger to advance another organization's agenda, as is so often the case in transnational anti-sweatshop campaigns (*see* Brooks 2007). In February 2009, two union leaders travelled to Omaha, Nebraska, to personally knock on the door of the home of Berkshire Hathaway Chair Warren Buffett – later that year, one union leader spoke at Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway shareholder meeting (popularly called “Woodstock for capitalists”), directly confronting FOTL's then-CEO John Holland with stories of death threats and other labour abuse at JDH (Stop Sweatshops 2009). But most importantly, when FOTL was ready to discuss a

²⁴ On May 13, 2009, sixty-five members of the US Congress sent a letter to Russell Athletic CEO John Holland expressing grave concern over labour violations (US Congress 2009).

settlement in the face of significant harm to the company's bottom line, it was the Honduran workers themselves who negotiated face-to-face with top executives.

FOTL and workers' union reached the agreement at a meeting in Washington in November 2009. The consumer campaign ended and JND opened its doors, but workers' union efforts were just getting started. In May 2011, after 9 months of negotiations, JND and the union signed an impressive first collective bargaining agreement. It stipulated an immediate wage increase of 19.5%, with another increase of 7% in January 2012 (USAS 2011; 2012). Wage negotiations in the summer of 2013 added another 9.5% raise for most workers (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. A union sign attached to a sewing machine at Jerzees Nuevo Dia reads, "We demand fair wages." April 2, 2013.

In October 2013, the legal minimum wage for factories in Honduras' free trade

zones was 4,982.13 Lempiras (\$245 USD) per month. The JND unionists estimate the majority of JND workers earn over 8,000 Lempiras (\$395 USD) per month. Workers also enjoyed rare benefits such as free lunch and free transportation to and from work – both major expenses for garment workers in the region, whom typically may spend upwards of 20% of their salary on bus fare and their factory’s cafeteria²⁵. Down time resulting from sewing machines in need of repair were no longer counted against a worker’s pay calculation, incentivizing management to keep equipment working safely and efficiently.

In September 2013, Reyna Dominguez reported that JND’s production quotas are more reasonable than at factories of FOTL’s main competitors, Hanesbrands and Gildan Activewear – she estimates workers in those factories earn wages approximately 25% lower, and work longer hours. Gildan, which competes fiercely with FOTL for shelf space at Walmart and other retailers, has bragged that its “low-cost manufacturing” is “giving the retailers better margins” than FOTL (Altstedter 2012). It is no coincidence that Gildan’s production network has been so riddled with labour violations, from refusing to pay minimum wage in Haiti to death threats against unionists in Honduras, that workers making Gildan products in four countries held an international protest in July 2012 (IULBR 2013a).

Beyond opening JND, the November 2009 settlement agreement included a unique provision whereby FOTL agreed to remain neutral to unionization at all its Honduran facilities, as well as phasing out “collective pacts” – a particular Honduran form of employer-dominated representation

²⁵ Based on a number of worker interviews in August 2013.

(WRC 2009). The WRC had advocated forcefully for such a proactive measure, given the repeated violations of workers' freedom of association over the preceding two years. Asked why her negotiating commission decided to make this a priority in its talks with FOTL, Dominguez replied:

We took the initiative to protect other workers, because obviously when they saw the successes of Jerzees Nuevo Dia, the rest of the workers would want to organize. So, to avoid the problems of firing and fear, this was important. ... It has gone well. There are now three unionized Fruit factories.

Indeed, the success at JND inspired other FOTL workers to organize. Workers at Jerzees Buena Vista (JBV) signed a landmark Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with FOTL winning benefits similar to those at JND. Additionally, by 2013 workers at the FOTL facility VFI²⁶, formerly Vanity Fair International, in Honduras and Joya De Ceren Factory in El Salvador had formed unions and begun dialogue with FOTL executives. As of January 2014, the VFI workers are in the midst of collective bargaining, expecting to win benefits similar to what workers have won at JND and JBV, while the Joya De Ceren workers just this month have begun direct meetings between their union and local Fruit management.

The FOTL campaign illustrates a model that emerged in a series of campaigns over two decades. This model begins with a union-driven campaign, employer intransigence instigates an independent investigation, closely followed by an international campaign in order to leverage economic power against the relevant TNCs, finally resulting in face-to-face negotiations between

²⁶ FOTL purchased the Vanity Fair Lingerie division from VF Corporation in 2007.

executives and workers ensuring enforcement and augmenting workers' power. What remained fundamentally a worker struggle skillfully made the most of the existing auditing regime.

But can this example of direct engagement be replicated with other TNCs? In theory, there is reason to be pessimistic due to a number of exceptional circumstances. While FOTL does outsource much of its production, the four union factories in Honduras and El Salvador are vertically integrated – they are subsidiaries of FOTL itself. More importantly, the factories are a planned “industrial cluster”, part of an “location agglomeration” spatial logic, in which the dense concentration of capital and labour reduces the spatially dependent cost of their joint interactions (Sassen 1998; Scott 2009). FOTL has invested massive amounts of capital in Honduras and neighbouring El Salvador since the 1990s, employing over 20,000 workers in the two countries alone. Its Central American facilities include textile mills, much less mobile than typical assembly plants due to the large and expensive machinery involved in producing fabric. Its local management team has been developed through years of experience in Central America along with training in the US. This all adds up to a significant incentive to keep work in Honduras and El Salvador regardless of the union efforts. Generally, apparel TNCs rarely perform any production in factories they own, relying almost exclusively on sub-contracting, removing this particular incentive to tolerate a union campaign. The direct relationships involved in the industrial cluster also made it impossible for FOTL to deny responsibility for labour relations at its plants, whereas a key stumbling block to countless garment union efforts has been

TNCs stubborn denial of their responsibility to outsourced labour. While workers proved they could collapse the layers of bureaucracy between a CEO and workers at a subsidiary of the same TNC, it is not self-evident that a similar strategy could unravel the web of contracting and subcontracting between workers and the brands at a typical garment export factory.

Fortunately, a pair of campaigns followed that showed similar strategies could in fact bring TNCs to negotiate with subcontract workers and take direct responsibility for labour violations at outsourced facilities. In January of 2009, two separate Nike subcontracted factories closed in Honduras, Hugger de Honduras and Vision Tex (for simplicity, “H&VT”), and denied workers \$2.2m in severance and other legally-mandated benefits. The CGT, representing the former workers of H&VT, replicated its JDH strategy to demand workers received their due. Nike, the largest brand for both factories (Nike 2010), released an early public statement that echoed two decades of denying responsibility for subcontracted factories, claiming the “factories which directly employ workers are responsible” rather than the transnational brands (Nike 2010). However, after workers’ trips to universities with USAS resulted in several universities canceling their contracts, on July 23, 2010, Nike signed a deal with the CGT to pay the severance and health benefits owed to workers.

Similarly in January 2011, the PT Kizone factory in Indonesia closed and its owner fled, leaving 2,700 workers owed more than \$3.3m in legally required unpaid severance. Some of the TNCs appeared to have learned their lesson: Nike quickly chipped in \$500,000, Dallas Cowboys paid \$55,000, and brands’

intermediary Green Textile paid another \$1m. But \$1.8m remained. The final brand – Adidas – clung to the argument that it was not responsible for violations at contract factories. In addition to working with USAS to sever Adidas’ university licenses, the PT Kizone workers’ union received advice on organizing and negotiating from the CGT as well as Sitrasacosi, the union that formerly represented workers at the aforementioned abandoned Adidas contractor Hermosa²⁷. By then, those two unions had joined others to form a new global union coalition, what would become the International Union League for Brand Responsibility (“League”). The former Kizone workers also joined the League, which provided the workers negotiating advisors before and during their meeting with Adidas executives. In April 2013, Adidas and the ex-workers’ union signed a settlement agreement, in which Adidas paid the outstanding debt to Kizone workers – a first for the brand, and a sea change after their stubborn refusal to pay severance to the former Hermosa workers.

Even as these brands directly compensated workers at outsourced production sites, both Nike and Adidas were careful not to admit direct liability, respectively calling the payouts a “workers’ relief fund” and “humanitarian aid” (Greenhouse 2010; Adidas Group 2013). Semantic acrobatics aside, what happened in both cases is unmistakable: TNCs negotiated directly with workers from subcontract factories and paid money owed to workers for time spent sewing the TNCs products. In particular, Nike’s speedy response to the Kizone case after paying the H&VT workers shows an unambiguous shift in

²⁷ The 250 workers at the Hermosa Factory were left without jobs after its closure in 2005. Workers never fully received their legally mandated severance from Adidas or the factory.

the structural relationship between apparel transnationals and outsourced labour.

A New Day

The cases described above offer potent lessons for garment workers and anti-sweatshop activists. As Compa writes, “The CGT’s success in Fruit of the Loom plants has led to a coordinating group of unions throughout Central America aiming to persuade more firms to respect their organizing rights.”

Since 2011, this ad-hoc regional group of unions has transformed into a global union coalition dedicated to bottom-up organizing campaigns in the production networks of the biggest transnational brands. By 2013, the League formally launched, made up of national union federations of garment, textile and footwear factory workers in ten countries, from El Salvador to Bangladesh to Cambodia. At several union meetings, from 2011 through the League’s public launch in February 2013, various leaders from the CGT and FOTL workers’ union made presentations about their victory, explained how it was achieved, and urged the unionists from other countries to take up similar strategies²⁸.

These unionists have set their sights on an ambitious goal: global bargaining between workers and TNCs that would echo the jobber agreements won through workers’ industrial action nearly a century ago. In their February 10, 2013, public statement, the unionists urged workers in their industry

²⁸ Based on physical interviews with a number of union leaders across Central America including leaders CGT leaders and FOTL workers.

globally to “use our power to force [the TNCs] to sit down face to face with us to negotiate serious solutions to these matters of life or death, dignity or misery.” They particularly call for direct dialogue with their first global campaign target, Germany-based Adidas Group (IULBR 2013b):

We demand a negotiation between our workplace unions and the industry’s highest executives, the true owners of the production system and those who degrade our working conditions in order to increase their profits.

The FOTL story provides a practical example of the limitations of negotiations that do not involve the true decision-makers. Dominguez formed part of the union’s negotiating commission both in 2009, with local JDH management, and in 2010, face-to-face with top FOTL executives including CEO Rick Medlin both in Honduras and in Washington. Reflecting on the experience, she says: “In negotiations here in Honduras with the local plant management, they didn’t have the power to make decisions about whether to give ten [Lempiras] or more than ten when workers are asking for twenty. They didn’t have the power to decide. ... With them, we didn’t achieve anything.” If this dynamic exists at a factory owned directly by the TNC, it is certainly even more pronounced at a contract factory where any increase in prices due to labour improvements can cause transnational brands to look elsewhere for cheaper production. Speaking favourably of her direct interactions with the CEO, Dominguez says, “If Rick Medlin says he can go five [Lempiras] higher, he means it, instead of stalling. The top executives honor their word and have the power to make decisions.” Such mature dialogue was a relief after the union’s futile exercise of negotiating with a party in no position to make decisions.

Dominguez went on to argue that the same can be achieved with other transnational brands: “This happened, and can happen with another brand, because of international pressure.” The FOTL case upended accepted rules of the global race to the bottom, laying the groundwork for negotiations between CGT and Nike at H&VT and between PT Kizone ex-workers’ union and Adidas, pushing the boundaries of TNCs self-proclaimed “responsibility.” The Honduran workers’ gains may contradict the expectations of scholars of labour union politics in the region. While the CGT is considered politically moderate compared to its explicitly left-aligned national union counterparts, the CGT garment unionists have taken a militant approach that includes strikes and mass participation of workers²⁹. Also, together with the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras* (CTH) and the *Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras* (CUTH) union centres, the CGT led mass industrial action against the 2009 military coup that ousted centre-left and Chavez-friendly President Manuel Zelaya (CGT 2009), and many CGT garment worker activists joined anti-coup protests under the banner of “Feminists in Resistance.” This militant response might surprise some theorists of “labour imperialism” because the CGT was receiving funds that originated from the US Department of State³⁰ for a labour rights education program in the garment

²⁹ In the FOTL case, Anner (2011) points out that the CGT began acting more like a radical union after the introduction of the collective pacts – an inversion of the “radical left flank”.

³⁰ The CGT had a program with the AFL-CIO Solidarity Centre funded by a grant from the US Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour. The Solidarity Centre is the successor of the American Institute for Free Labour Development (AIFLD), which received US State Department funding to encourage innocuous “business unionism” and in some cases worked to destabilize “unfriendly” governments, including left-wing governments in Latin America (Scipes 2011; 2005; 2000). Some scholars maintain that the Solidarity Centre continues the legacy of labour imperialism established under AIFLD (Bass 2012)

sector, while the US government tacitly supported the coup by refraining in calling it a “coup” and in recognizing the new government (McLean, Shane, and Tse 2014). In this case, the evidence is clear that CGT leaders exercised independent agency and their political behavior was not simply determined by participating in a program funded by the US government³¹.

Indeed the series of events in Honduras that occurred concurrently with the FOTL campaign reveals larger questions around worker organization vis-à-vis the state and empire³². The FOTL case reveals a disjuncture between the pressures of a state bent on attracting foreign investment, a US-led empire and its attempt to tame or dislodge worker agitation when expedient against the organic struggles of workers on the ground. The CGT’s ability to succeed against employer intransigence and a repressive government without capitulating to larger geopolitical machinations, if indeed such pressure came to bear, remains notable. The Honduran state had no formal role in the CGT-FOTL agreement, which fundamentally changed labour relations at the country’s largest private employer, revealing the state in a subordinate power relationship to a TNC – a dynamic the CGT has fully grasped, as has the League, informing their strategy of direct engagement with the TNC.

³¹ In fact, on the contrary, the AFL-CIO Solidarity Centre petitioned the post-coup government and Organization of American States to take measures to protect CGT leaders from death threats related to their opposition to the coup, as is mentioned in this leaked US State Department cable (see Wikileaks 2009).

³² The resurrection of the debate over US global power erupted with Hardt and Negri’s (2001) contention over its decline in managing the *Empire* it had spawned. That globalisation has led to a weakening of the regulatory power of the state is well founded, but recent scholarship suggests a hardening of the materiality of nations to manage capitalism’s crisis tendencies (Desai 2013) with Panitch and Gindin (2013) contending that a number of states continue to uphold an imperial system at the direction of the US.

Lessons for Bangladesh

As shown above, before the FOTL campaign, the failure of social auditing and codes of conduct was clear, but the anti-sweatshop movement's alternative solution was not. But, if in 2007 hopes were fading for the implementation of a proactive solution like the DSP, unions' recent victories at FOTL and beyond hold the power to inspire ambitious new efforts forward. Here we explore why.

Anner (2011) describes the apparel export industry as embedded in what he calls a "triangle of power" of brand-name clothing companies, local suppliers, and the state. He argues that unions must target all three planks in order to ensure the rights of workers. The CGT certainly targeted all three entities – as described above, little progress was made dealing only with local management and local authorities, and results came once the union targeted brand itself as well.

Separately, Anner (2013) observes that the FOTL campaign's positive outcomes resulted in part from an "empowering frame" rather than a "victimization frame," arguing that while the latter may woo broader support with sensational tropes of a helpless oppressed worker, it also is more likely to lead to ineffective top-down solutions. As evidence, Anner cites the main photo used in much of the campaign's literature (Fig. 2) as a symbol of this insistence on maintaining Honduran workers as the protagonists:

Instead of depicting very young women in the campaign fliers, they used two older elected leaders of the factory union, one male and one female. And instead of depicting them as vulnerable victims, the image of the unionists was one of strength and determination. The solution suggested by the message and the image was one of worker organization through respect for internationally recognized freedom of association

rights, not paternalism. This was a deliberate decision on the part of the Honduran unionists and their USAS allies. (p.33)



Figure 2. JDH union leaders Moises Montoya and Norma Chavarria at University of Minnesota, February 13, 2011. (Credit: Minnesota Daily)

During the campaign the union leaders developed the knowledge and skill necessary to convince university administrators to sever ties with FOTL and finally to negotiate directly with the company's CEO. Naturally, the activists did not shy away from more sensational details – one union leader was often brought to tears in public events as she describes death threats she had faced and her family's economic hardship since the factory closed. However, virtually every campaign document and press release makes clear that the campaign would continue until FOTL was back at the bargaining table with workers' union.

Besides being a clear anti-sweatshop victory, the FOTL campaign was

unmistakably a success for unions. Greenhouse's article (2009), the settlement, clearly emphasized the union component as a radical departure from other campaigns in the sector³³, even though the article focused primarily on US students' role in the campaign. That the discourse today around the Rana Plaza tragedy tends towards the "victimization frame" ought to be cause for serious reflection. US unions and Non-Governmental Organization's (NGOs) have rallied to end "deathtraps," and two global union federations have negotiated the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh ("Accord"), which centres on establishing a new auditing system, an inspection program funded by transnational brands (AFBSB 2013), and USAS launched its "end deathtraps" campaign to pressure universities to require brands that manufacture their apparel to sign the Accord. As Compa warns, "the one-day visits and checklist-style monitoring routine in such efforts have not worked."

In fact, despite its focus on auditing, the Accord takes a major step towards restoring brands' direct responsibility to workers for their conditions. Specifically around safety issues in contract factories in Bangladesh, not only are brands responsible for financing the costs of repairs and renovations necessary to make factories safe, but workers – via the signatory Bangladeshi unions – can take brands to binding arbitration to ensure enforcement of the agreement – a far cry from voluntary agreements that are the norm in the industry (AFBSB 2013). This is perhaps the most important difference between the Accord and a parallel effort by a number of US apparel companies calling themselves the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety – while the latter insists

³³ In Greenhouse's (2009) article the word "union" or "unionized" appears twelve times.

on calling its program “binding,” workers have no way to legally hold brands responsible for future safety problems.

However, the Accord’s inspection system is not irreconcilable with union organizing; in fact, there is evidence to suggest that the Accord may compliment union organizing. The Accord stands apart from other auditing systems in that its steering committee includes two Geneva-based global unions and one representative from a Bangladeshi union. Plus, the Accord explicitly delineates Bangladesh unions role in the mandatory establishment of factory-level “health and safety committees”, a well-documented first step to ensure safety (Reilly, Paci, and Holl 1995). The agreement stipulates that if brands do not hold their end of the deal, the Bangladesh unions that signed the Accord can enforce the agreement in the courts of the violating brand’s home country – establishing a precedent for legally-binding brand responsibility to local unions. Notably, however, the vast majority of factories covered by the Accord have no union presence, which poses the prime obstacle to its implementation. Thus, while the Accord gives unions additional tools to enforce workers’ rights from the factory floor, the tools are practically unusable if not in the hands of unionized workers.

Safety issues in Bangladesh are merely a symptom of the global industry's deeper structural problem – i.e. globalised outsourcing and the “race to the bottom.” The Accord gives workers a tool to fend off the most extreme side effects, but has no intention of curing the disease itself. Accordingly, a bottom-up effort to organize and unite workers in the production network of a

TNC, to struggle and bargain across borders, remains one of the only sustainable avenues to confront footloose capital. Efforts related to the Accord are at best a complement to ongoing local union organizing efforts. As a conjoiner to Compa's argument, while a reproduction of ineffective auditing methods is not entirely encouraging, efforts to defend workers' right to unionize could operate reciprocally with a new inspection system to ensure safe factories. What the FOTL case illustrates is that an auditing regime from above is only as effective as its weaponization by a workers organization from below.

Most importantly, Bangladesh unions themselves have shown they will not simply wait for top-down policy reforms – to the contrary, in recent years the country's garment workers have been organizing with increasing success. One sign is that as of August 2013 forty-five garment factory unions had been registered since the beginning of 2013, a sharp contrast to the two registered in total in the three preceding years (JDL 2013). By late September 2013, 200 thousand garment workers had taken to the street for days of mass protest, shutting down hundreds of factories, and demanding a 2.5-fold minimum wage increase, while factory owners claimed that as long as brands were unwilling to pay more their hands were tied (Burke and Hammadi 2013).

By November of 2013 a government-appointed commission in Bangladesh supported a 77% raise for garment workers, nonetheless the \$66.25 monthly min wage remained the lowest in the world. Workers rejected the proposal demanding \$100 instead, and followed through with days of rioting destroying a number of factories and shutting down 100 more (Alam 2014), in a what the late historian Erik Hobsbawm (1952) would aptly call “collective bargaining by riot.”

After the catastrophe at Rana Plaza the global anti-sweatshop movement finds itself at a crossroads. History suggests that prioritizing a new auditing regime, no matter how comprehensive, will do little to attack the structural roots of the dangerous, miserable conditions of the global garment industry. The alternative is to prioritize aggressive organizing efforts that unite workers globally in a direct assault on the true shot-callers of the industry. For decades, apparel transnationals have comfortably harvested enormous profits behind the curtain of globalised outsourcing. Workers in Honduras and Indonesia have begun tearing holes, catching glimpses of a new order where genuine international labour solidarity forces those getting the richest to meet eye-to-eye with those creating the wealth on sewing machines and cutting tables every day. When the labour unions, activists and advocates of the global anti-sweatshop movement marshal all of their resources – financial, moral, political and human – to support smart, focused, bottom-up organizing in major TNCs production networks, workers on the factory floor will radically transform their industry.

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Chapter 5: A Global Contract to End Sweatshops

Examining the feasibility of transnational collective bargaining in the garment sector

This paper investigates the possibility of collective bargaining at a global scale in the garment sector. Its case study is the emerging cross-border campaign by workers who labour in mostly subcontracted garment factories for transnational brands. Their demand for a transnational jobbers' agreement is located beyond the familiar scholarly frameworks of the European "social model" that have typically failed in producing durable victories for workers. Globalisation demands new strategies of organization, as this paper will show, there are historical precedents that provide useful lessons in the emerging transnational campaigns of today.

Keywords: collective bargaining, trade union, garment sector, transnational, global unions, jobber agreement, social partnership

One of the consequences of 'globalisation' has been the relocation of industrial production from the Global North to the Global South. In response, two different types of transnational countervailing strategies have been developed by Global North trade unions. In Europe, capital and labour confrontation became a compromise was bound up with a strong state regulatory apparatus (Hyman 1975; P. Evans 2010). But in North America, more specifically the U.S. but later Canada, where regulations were comparatively weak, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) was nonetheless successful, and overcame many of the same hurdles that mark today's "globalised" epoch (Wolensky, Wolensky, and Wolensky 2002; Mark Anner, Bair, and Blasi 2012).

Two irreconcilable garment worker trade union strategies grew out of Europe's partnerships versus U.S. antagonistic models.

Both European and North American-based approaches to tackling globalisation's consequences in the garment industry fell under the "global governance"³⁴ regime of the 1990s, but utilized very different tactics. In Europe, unions reconfigured the "International Trade Secretariats" as "Global Union Federations" (GUFs); in U.S., they pursued campaign strategies through an uneasy alliance with the anti-sweatshop movement. Despite these initiatives, real wages have generally continued to fall in the global garment sector (WRC 2013a), as union density has contracted (Maree 2009), and collective bargaining become nearly absent in the sector (J. L. Esbenshade 2004). And as recent preventable disasters, or "industrial accidents"--some of the worst in history—attest, workplace safety is still a significant problem (Manik and Yardley 2013).

The paper explores successful models of portable collective bargaining techniques that were established in the U.S. by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), which combining both a supply chain "Jobber Agreement" demand and a clandestine organizing strategy, later known as the "organizing model". I argue that capital in the U.S. has long been mobile compared to labour, and not coincidentally the federalist system of laws that has governed the ebbs and flows of U.S. domestic commerce across state borders bear comparison to the globalised garment industry in its infancy.

³⁴ There is a vast and growing body of literature that has identified governance measures under different labels, among them "soft law" (Cini 2001), "outsourced regulation" (O'Rourke 2003), "privatized regulation" (AFL-CIO 2013), "self-regulation" (Blackett 2000), "stateless regulation" (Gay Seidman 2007), "auditing regime" (Kumar and Mahoney 2014), "non-state driven governance" (Cashore 2002), or simply "governance" (Hassel 2008; Levy and Prakash 2003).

Innovations by labour led to innovations by capital, which led to further innovations by labour, which led to further innovations by capital, and so on (Herod 1997b; B.J. Silver 2003; Tronti 1966). Labour's successful attempt to 'chase the work' to combat garment capital's internal 'race to the bottom' within the U.S. and then across North America may have laid the groundwork for the sector's internationalization. Nonetheless, this extra-national dynamic magnifies labour's challenge presented by globally disintegrated supply chains or "outsourcing."

I will demonstrate how global apparel production resembles the jobber-contractor system of production that characterized the U.S. domestic apparel industry before the rise of offshore production that began in the 1970s. The domestic outsourcing of American garment production began at the turn of the 20th century in lower Manhattan, to where the word "sweatshop" traces its etymology, as a means of ensuring union-free workplaces and low fixed costs as well as cheaper labour (J. L. Collins 2009). Unions have since had to confront the related problems of capital flight and a "race to the bottom" in labour costs. Over five decades production moved from the unionized shops of lower Manhattan and Montreal to the non-union U.S. northeast, and then to the U.S. South and West--which were historically hostile to efforts to organize labour--and from there to Puerto Rico. At the time, the ILGWU utilized a systematized and clandestine organizing method, later called the "organizing model", that included rigorous factory floor organizing, retail consumer boycotts, and industrial action to demand collective bargaining directly from brands such as Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren, who were known as "jobbers" because they

outsourced—or “jobbed out”—their production to their contractors, the direct employers. These direct brand-union agreements were called “jobbers’ agreements.” Jobbers’ Agreements (JA) ensured workers received better pay and conditions, embedding the antagonism between labour and capital within a relatively combative system of industrial relations.

Meanwhile in Europe, a diametrically opposite method developed under the aegis of social democratic states labour and capital undertook “social dialogue” to form “social partnerships.”³⁵ Compared to its North American counterpart, European capital in the sector remained relatively fixed, vertically integrated, and *cooperative*. European trade unionists were still largely insulated from the hazards that accompany outsourcing and a wage “race to the bottom.” This so-called “social model” developed out of, and the result of, the historic class conflict and social confrontation between labour and capital, and this “class compromise” become institutionalized in the 1930s across much of Western Europe and led to enormous short-term gains for workers and formed the basis for the welfare state (Wahl 2004, 2). Consequently, this process sidelined trade union militants, de-politicizing the working class, and eased the antagonisms between workers and their employers (Hobsbawm 1995). The achievements of the social partnership model engendered a working class ideology attracted to peaceful social dialogue, averse to confrontation, and “deeply rooted in the national and European trade union bureaucracy” (Wahl 2004, 4). However, the class compromise was always a delicate arrangement

³⁵ “Social Dialogue” also known as social pact, social contract, class compromise, or consensus policy is “the relatively stable power relations and peaceful cohabitation between labour and capital, which was dominant in the post War period in particular in most of Western Europe” (Wahl 2004, 1).

predicated on capitalist growth within the West. Thus, this social partnership became increasingly untenable during the economic crisis of the 1970s and onwards as capital internationalized and class contradictions heightened.

This paper argues that when production began its migration to the Global South in the late 1960s, these two approaches, the European “social model” and the U.S. “organizing model”, came into conflict, as both sought to expand the scope of their activities to meet the challenges of hypermobile capital. The European garment trade unions lacked the recent experience of U.S. unions, who had already battled regionally decentralized capital and reactionary anti-unionism for decades, problems both sides of the Atlantic now faced. U.S. unions, for their own part, were hesitant to advance beyond their own national borders. And because of these respective failings, globalised capital in the garment sector has so far succeeded in its objective of expansion - at the expense of labour.

Formal union bureaucracies have launched various governance initiatives, such as the International Framework Agreements (IFAs). IFAs can best be termed “institutional transnationalism”, since they are led and instituted by the formal union bureaucracies, which have a broad reach and support local union efforts. This paper will show that such agreements, negotiated and signed within the headquarters of transnational corporations (“TNCs”) and GUFs, far away from the subcontracted sites of production, lack the participation of grassroots actors (local workers and local management alike) (McCallum 2013). On the other hand, some organizing campaigns, such as but not limited to the U.S. anti-sweatshop movement (Brooks 2007) and the

global jobber strategy, may be considered examples of “participatory transnationalism,” in which workers target factory owners and brands, while workers engage and later ally with consumers to launch campaigns against brands and retailers, building participatory power throughout the supply chain. Although the latter tactic has succeeded in isolated cases, it lacks the institutional scale necessary to become a successful global strategy.

After an assessment of the success and limitation of this strategy the paper concludes with an investigation of the newly formed International Union League for Brand Responsibility (“League”) of garment worker unions whose demand for a globally negotiated JA purport to synthesize the strategies of both major approaches. Though collective bargaining in the garment sector does not currently exist at a global level, the campaign to establish a transnational jobber’s agreement offers a promising new strategy by emulating historical precedents building upon their strengths while attempting to rectify some of their weaknesses.

The campaign for a global JA presents unions with new opportunities to build solidarity and capacity, while focusing their combined strength on unified targets, greatly enlarging their influence in the workplace. And though, on the surface, they resemble IFAs, JAs vest workers themselves with contract enforceability. Therein lies their strength: a flatly democratic methodology, in which those who enforce the contract are the same who negotiated it. Demands born in shop floor struggles arrive at the bargaining table unalloyed, still charged with the demonstrated power that cowed management into considering concession. Factory-level union representatives have been part of

any negotiations with the brands, bringing workers face-to-face with the top executives of the brands, their indirect employers. This is a source of tremendous moral power, as exhibited in the negotiations over the by the CGT-Fruit of the Loom agreement (Kumar and Mahoney 2014). Of course the national union leaders and the League leaders would also be at the table. However, when layers of bureaucracy, such as exist in GUFs, are interposed between workers and management, complacency and a distance from shop floor conditions combine to dilute demands, as career negotiators seek to please TNCs into an agreement, without the power of workers behind them—forgetting the inherently unjust asymmetry in capitalistic industrial relations. Through its exploration of these two disparate traditions in the globalised garment sector, this paper raises the prospect of transnational collective bargaining by way of a synthesis of an “organizing model” strategy with a “jobbers agreement” demand.

Transnational Collective Bargaining

In 2005, the late Neil Kearney, then General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF)³⁶, delivered a series of speeches under the banner, “Life beyond Codes.” Kearney drew attention to the losses garment workers had experienced over the previous decade, during which real wages had fallen 25% and working hours had risen 25% to an average of 60 hours a week. He painted a “pretty depressing picture” of the existing governance regimes (ITGLWF 2007). “[T]en years of corporate

³⁶ In 2012 the ITGLWF merged with GUFs ICEM and IMF to form IndustriALL and is based in Geneva

code of conduct application,” Kearney proclaimed, “had brought little change to workplaces, with conditions often worse than they were a decade ago...Now the time has come to be looking at ‘life beyond codes.’” Neil Kearney’s personal evolution, as a banker turned garment sector union leader, is not incongruent in a regime of “social models”, where structural antagonisms are blurred and emphasis is placed on class cooperation. Nonetheless, Kearney recognized the profound restructuring global capitalism had undergone since the late 1960s and the consequent need of labour to globalise its own strategies in response. For Kearney and the ITGLWF’s case this meant globalising the “social partnership model.”

Contemporaneous with the rise of “globalisation³⁷” new initiatives emerged to counter the fragmentation of state-based trade unions and increased fluidity of capital, in an attempt to globalise workers’ rights. Top-down initiatives, often face-saving measures driven by transnational corporations, included consumer-led campaigns driven by NGOs, in addition to efforts by supranational bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Bank – which tended to reinforce the neoliberal status quo. Two approaches that were led by trade unions, however, did manage to establish themselves in the same period: the GUF-initiated International Framework Agreements (IFAs) and the US-led anti-sweatshop movement, which I will describe in detail later.

³⁷ “Globalisation” is a contested concept but within this paper will be taken as the global relocation of industrial capital which accelerated the 1970s (Harvey 2005; B.J. Silver 2003).

According to some scholars, globalisation has eroded the gains of labour by establishing a structural asymmetry in which capital is fluid but labour is fixed (Klein 2000; Rudra 2002; Kabeer 2004)--an imbalance that has made traditional collective bargaining tactics less successful than previously, if not obsolete. Uneven global development has allowed Transnational Corporations (TNCs) to “shop around” for labour conditions with increasing precision and selection, and even reshape the geography to take advantage of variables that ensure optimum capital accumulation by, for example, developing transportation and production infrastructure while skirting local labour laws and enforcing structural unemployment (Sassen 1998).

Both U.S. and European industrial relations should be understood as the regulation of work by the combination of three factors: state intervention, market forces, and collective bargaining (Hyman 2005). First coined by British Fabians Beatrice and Sydney Webb, “collective bargaining” described the negotiations between trade unions and employers in the 19th late century. In the Webbs’ book *Industrial Democracy* (2010), the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was said to have revolutionized the operation of supply and demand, introducing new “rule makers” and “regulators” that enabled workers to “ward off the evil effects of industrial competition” (Webb and Webb 2010, 867). The employer and employee have opposing interests they noted. Thus, “a collective bargaining agreement [was], in an institutional form, the temporary outcome of a conflict situation” (Dan Gallin 2008, 26). Further, the Webbs found that the scope of collective bargaining was progressively enlarged, “from

the workshop to the whole town, and from the town to the whole industry” (Flanders 1968, 3), as workers made rational extensions of their victories. The CBAs served to consolidate the balance of power in society. Collective bargaining, and indeed industrial relations in most countries, first developed on local and occupational bases, and didn’t expand to national institutional frameworks until much later (Hyman 2005). And it was quickly discovered that “the greater the scale of the bargaining unit, the greater their advantage” (Flanders 1968, 3). More workers in the collective meant more power at the negotiating table. A similar conclusion can be drawn today at a transnational level, since the fundamental dynamics remain mostly unchanged. Despite the obvious trajectory of such an antagonism, decades of general strikes, factory occupations, and depression-era work stoppages had to transpire before the integration of a U.S. regulatory apparatus, of which some sectors such as garments always remained outside of.

Recent years have seen a growing body of literature on transnational workers’ movements many documenting instances of cross-border and transnational trade union solidarity (Mark Anner 2011; Bronfenbrenner 2007; Friedman 2009). In spite of this, class struggle is still often portrayed as a sealed chapter in history following the deindustrialization of the Global North (Castells 1996). Even within labour studies, much of the focus remains confined to nation states (Pasture 2002). Historically, however, working class nationalism and internationalism have emerged simultaneously, with the trade union movement becoming nationally oriented over time (Hensman 2011). Trade union transnationalism often maintained its internationalist political

rhetoric while gradually developing into a kind of trade union tourism or diplomacy in international bodies such as the ILO (Wahl 2004). Pasture (2002) claims that, while internationalism once played a significant role in the formation of socialist working class identity, trade unions focused their energies only on winning social advances and transforming their local regimes into welfare states (Pasture 2002). From industrialization into the post-WWII era, capital controls and trade regulation ensured that industry remained largely fixed within national boundaries, such that internationalism was not yet a necessity for Global North workers (Tilly 1995). Even in an era of globalised capital, trade unions in the north, instead of launching international campaigns, still often resort to protectionism by appealing to nationalist sympathies and allying themselves with domestic producers (Haworth and Ramsay 1988).

Charles Tilly (1995) has argued that globalisation threatens established labour rights by undermining the state's capacity to guarantee those rights. He claims that globalisation has returned industrial relations to their state in the early 19th century; that the kind of industrialization that led to regulatory apparatuses, enshrining the collective rights of workers has now come to an end. Tilly contends that the state operated as an arbiter between labour and capital, a history that is contested by Peter Evans (2010, 356) who claims that the state has rarely been a dependable ally of labour, stating:

“Such moments can be easily interpreted as consequences of labour mobilization rather than causes of successful contestation. The Tilly (1995) vision of the state as essential ally may be plausible for mid-twentieth century European social democracies, but state as ally to capital

and implacable adversary to labour is the more familiar role in the Global South (and the United States)...In short, equating neo-liberal globalisation with the loss of the state as ally is a dubious proposition.”

From National to Global Governance

The first efforts of national unions to make global connections were confined to specific trades and industries. By the middle of 19th Century there had been a proliferation of what were then called International Trade Secretariats (now Global Union Federations or GUFs). These developed contemporary to, and often in consequence of, exacerbations of racial, geographic, and class divides caused by imperialism. Capital’s shift of production to the third-world engages it in a neo-imperialism whose scale and effects—at once both cosmopolitan and provincial—are global.

Attempts at global industrial relations in the garment sector grew out of the national traditions of the late 20th century, namely Europe’s “social model”, the U.S.’s “organizing model”, Japan’s management-dominated “company employment relations model”, the state subordinated models of other East Asian trade unions (Deyo 1989), and some emerging garment union in the Global South (i.e. Philippines in the 1980s and 1990s) that espoused a militant, revolutionary model. Of these, the U.S. and Europe-based models became the primary transnational approaches to resisting globalisation in the 1980s and 1990s.

Defining the European social “dialogue” or “partnership” model (or simply the “social model”) is heavily contested (Guest and Peccei 2001), but generally “social dialogue/partnership” is meant to identify a relationship

between employers and trade unions that ensures a “cooperative set of relations within the firm” (Heery 2002, 21). The social model matured in the highly developed system of social protections and extensive labour market regulation of post-WWII era known as the “golden age” of welfare capitalism in Western Europe (Esping-Andersen 1999). In Europe, the system was enshrined by the 1957 Treaty of Rome, before being repackaged and included in the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, and then modernized again in 2009’s Lisbon Treaty. Despite the “social model” being a nationally embedded system of industrial relations, Hyman (2005) highlights a few important underlying similarities across western Europe. For one, a regulated and a robust welfare state led to significant limits on the degree to which labour power could be commodified; secondly, collective bargaining agreements had taken priority over the individual labour market contract; and lastly, the acceptance that labour necessitated representation, a premise from which it followed that labour should be a ‘social partner,’ shaping and circumscribing the work life of a nation, from its individual firms to the conception of its governmental policy. Social partnerships solidified the relationship of labour and capital, leading to unified demands upon the state that ensured job security, extensive training, flexible working hours, and broader social protections (Knell and Britain 1999). Unfortunately, the system also led to the protection of the immediate employment-centred interest of union members and deliberate insecurity for those less likely to be unionized (Heery 2002). Even within much of Europe the “social model” only lasted a few decades, and “flexibilizing” this model was declared the objective of governments and political parties in parts of Europe at

least since the 1980s. Before the relocation of production to the Global South, the power imbalances in these “partnerships” were already heavily tilted towards employers (Guest and Peccei 2001). Unfortunately, once deindustrialization began to set in, and the necessity for new tactics became clear, European trade unions merely adapted the already weakened social partnership model to a global stage. However, without the intercessory power of the state on their side, a lack of union density and often weak client states in the Global South, meant these efforts largely proved fruitless, and their emphasis on “institutional transnationalism” could ultimately only serve neoliberal ideology (Hyman 2005). In spite of some healthy diversity in the ranks—e.g.: the centralized French state, for example, begat a centralized labour movement, while the decentralized Swiss state begat a dispersed labour movement (Hanagan 2003)—this effort (since taken up by the ITGWLF) has mostly fallen flat.

Across the Atlantic, in the U.S., pluralistic state structures led to different, more economic business unionism (Levi 2003)—though a few sectors were left out. Garment, and later agriculture and service work, remained largely excluded from new labour protections. While the mostly black, and later Latino, agricultural and service workers were subject to the prejudices embedded in 1935’s Wagner act, garment sector exemption was a function of its supply chain structure (Perea 2011). Antagonistic conditions limited trade unions in these sectors. What would later come to be called the “organizing model” would emerge in conjunction with an increasingly deregulated US. labour market. The “organizing model” is a modern coinage of

an approach that descends from, at least, the early 20th century with the 1905 strike movement and subsequent repression in Russia leading to a clandestine approach, influenced by U.S. slave revolts and Global South anti-colonial struggles and popularized throughout the world by the Communist International and in the US by the Communist Party USA (Patel 2013).

Officially coined by the AFL-CIO in 1988, the “organizing model” distinguished itself from the “servicing model” (or “help[ing] people by solving problems for them”) by “involv[ing] members in solutions” (AFL-CIO 1988, 6). It was conceived expressly to shift power and decision-making to the rank-and-file, and marked a shift in practice regarding recruitment, operations, and targets. In contrast, the traditional “service model” emphasized the role of dedicated staff in the arbitration process and grievance procedures, charged solely with providing service, which effectively suppressed membership participation (Banks and Metzgar 1989). The “organizing model” jump-started active recruitment, launching confrontational campaigns stressing strategic research and supply chain “mapping”, and encouraging membership leadership, while also building clandestine worker committees, and establishing broader community support (Heery et al. 2000). Rather than simply target immediate employers or the state, the organizing model focused its efforts on leveraging primary actors in the supply chain: jobbers in the 1930s garment sector (Mark Anner, Bair, and Blasi 2012); retailers in the agricultural sector in the campaigns of the UFW in the 1960s (Shaw 2008); the clients contracting out cleaning services in the Service Employees International Union’s (SEIU) Justice for Janitors campaigns in the 1980s (Waldinger et al. 1996).

As U.S. union density dropped by as much as a fifth during the early 1980s, due to deregulation, privatization, automation, outsourcing--the cocktail of reforms that became known as “neoliberalism”--the organizing model began to spread throughout (what was left of) the American labour movement (Harvey 2006b). This was time tested for the ILGWU, however, which had been using this tactic in US garment sector since the turn of the century. The anti-sweatshop movement incorporated elements of the organizing model, and much of the same confrontational stance, but failed, as the ILGWU had, to expand the “jobber-contractor governance system” –that would be known as “outsourcing” becoming common practice in the era of globalised production, beyond U.S. borders. As will be discussed later in this paper, a newly formed international League of garment unions has incorporated both a “jobber agreement” approach, a globalised form of the ILGWU strategy that extends workers’ power across the global clothing supply chain, as well as the “organizing model”-style clandestine and comprehensive strategies of the US labour movement.

To understand the “participatory transnationalism” of today, we must consider the historical traditions out of which it has grown. Different kinds of capitalism led to differences in how commodity chains were formed and the way civil society actors attempted to challenge and transform them (Bair and Palpacuer 2012). The U.S. jobber-contractor system and the European social system engendered different forms of domestic industrial relations, a divide which has persisted since the earliest efforts to globalise garment labour strategies (K. Voss and Sherman 2000; Heery 2002).

As noted earlier, the “jobber agreement” model within the U.S. garment labour tradition is a reaction to domestic outsourcing in the garment sector, to capital’s flight from state to state, in search of higher return. Globalisation has since exacerbated the challenges that capital mobility creates for the workers who must now collectivize if they are to have a chance against their common enemy; challenges like: cultural difference, distance, and federated state structures. Since the advent of outsourcing in the U.S. system of garment production in the early 20th century, the primary methods of confronting the consequent race to the bottom it inaugurates, among other ill effects, in the garment sector arrived in two phases; first, the jobber agreement regime in Canada and the U.S.; then the American anti-sweatshop movement. As American unionists and union-linked NGOs continued to push a modified tradition of the jobbers’ agreement through organizing campaigns and holding brands responsible for labour conditions, the Europe-centric ITGLWF continued the tradition its modified social partnership, exemplified by the development of International Framework Agreements (IFAs) (*see Seidman 2007*).

The Jobber-Contractor System

Although there has been a great deal of research on the “social model,” the conclusions drawn from it rarely take into account the early precedent set by workers in the American garment sector. The omission of these Jobbers’ Agreements (JA) in otherwise robust critiques of the social auditing regime and

the exploration of what those agreements might mean for the 21st century is a loss for the field.

Jobbers at the turn of the 20th century maximized profits by creating fierce bidding wars between factory owners, through what became known as the “auction block” system in which “the work goes to the lowest bidder” (Anner, Bair, and Blasi 2012). Factory owners, in order to stay competitive and get the most for less, would increase downward pressures on workers. Consequently, factory-floor employees were reduced to poverty-line wages and their workplaces deteriorated. When workers unionized, brands simply stopped orders, ‘cutting-and-running’ to the next factory.

Building union density, raising wages, and forcing employers to establish safe work environments have always required the use of innovative and intuitive organizing methods. Within the garment sector, organizers used the vertical disintegration of capital endemic to the industry against it. In this structure, a retailer, such as a department store, like Macy’s, held the top position; and it obtained goods through the next rung below, a jobber, i.e.: a brand, such as Calvin Klein. The jobber was responsible for designing goods, marketing them to the public, and supplying the fabric necessary for their construction to contractors. The contractor hired workers to manufacture these goods. This allowed unions to exert pressure on all three while only specifically targeting the jobber. At the turn of the 20th century, when New York City was still the epicentre of domestic garment production, the ILGWU, owing to its early adoption of this tactic, was the largest union in the sector, and confronted many of the same dilemmas found in the globalised industrial relations of the

1980s and onward: subcontracting, hypermobile capital, porous government protections. But globalisation has now allowed capital to escape their orbit, and vastly expand the scope of its operations. In light of this, other sectors, such as those in the capital-intensive manufacturing, adopted the “jobber-contactor” system (i.e. outsourcing) as a standard for global supply chains.

The jobber agreement regimes were characterized by three mutually-reinforcing contractual relationships: (a.) The national industrial union negotiated contracts with a jobber over the designation of contractors, stipulating prices the jobber will pay to allow for fair wages and other provisions; (b.) Factory-level union representatives negotiated collective bargaining agreements with direct employers or contractors; (c.) The jobber gives long-term contracts to the designated unionized contractors that incorporate the pricing and other provisions from its agreement with the industrial union.

Mass garment production has always coupled cheap, retrograde manufacturing practices with the newest, most sophisticated methods in labour subjugation. Since the advent of the sewing machine in 1846, little has changed in the technology used on the shop floor (Bonacich 2001), or in the configuration of that shop floor. Exhausted and underpaid women still hunch over sewing machines; working to keep up with changes of season, the vagaries of fashion.

Confronting these structures a century ago, the ILGWU targeted not only the contractors, but the buyers (the “jobbers”) as well. The ILGWU maintained that the responsibility for labour conditions rested primarily with

the jobbers, since contracted factories were completely dependent on them. The first such “Jobbers Agreement” was born at Wiesen, Cohen, and Smith, a dress wholesaler, in 1922 (NYT 1922) and was hailed as the ILGWUs “move to rationalize the chaos in the industry and create conditions for its own expansion” (Whalen 2008, 196). But it was not until the 1930s, when ILGWU locals went on strike while also boycotting retailers, and threatening additional industrial action, that the agreements would expand and deepen. A 1955 Federal Trade Commission (FTC) ruling gives a synopsis of the ILGWUs history in its findings, revealing that JAs were won primarily through these and similar actions, issuing from the factory floor, in New York City cloak and suit sectors circa 1933, later the dress sector (circa 1936), and finally through actions in Los Angeles, where production had fled (circa 1942) (FTC 1955).

The 1957 Garment Industry Proviso, an amendment to the National Labour Relations Act, recognized the “joint employership” of both contractor and jobber within the garment sector. Joint employership had long facilitated the creation of a triangle bargaining system between the garment sector three primary actors: workers (represented through a union), jobbers, and contractors. Triangle bargaining functioned as follows: a union negotiated a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) individually with both a contractor and the relevant jobbers (initially with individual jobbers but later with employers’ associations of jobbers as well as contractors); then the jobbers negotiated an agreement themselves with this contractor (Whalen 2008). Negotiations between jobber and contractor were essential to ensuring implementation since

contractors required increased “pass through” funds on increases in wages and benefits. The jobber could only terminate its relationship with a “designated contractor” with “just cause” that was legally delineated in the JA. Triangle bargaining, which locked union jobbers into a symbiotic relationship with union contractors, remained the lynchpin for the success of the model.

As JAs proliferated, the membership of the ILGWU grew apace; it expanded from individual jobbers to a broad organized system requiring jobbers to contract exclusively with a designated list of registered unionized factories. The agreements operated as followings: first, they held both the brands and the owners responsible for factory conditions; second, they ensured funding associated with providing living wages was “ring-fenced” and not compromised; finally, they empowered workers on the shop floor to implement measures that they themselves had negotiated (Anner et al 2012). The agreements in effect regulated the industry, “abolish[ing] the ‘auction block’” (Schlesinger 1951, 103). Moreover, the jobber’s agreements stabilized the labour market by requiring that jobbers keep the designated permanent contractors “fully supplied with work.”

The mechanics of the jobber’s agreement forced jobbers to work with union shops, while protecting wages. Additionally, workweeks were set at 35 hours, and the jobber was made responsible for paying benefits (vacations, holidays, pensions, supplemental employment) into discrete and portable (i.e.: union-controlled) funds that followed workers from shop to shop. For every dollar worth of work put into a union contract shop, the jobber would pay an

additional 33 cents into these benefit funds, increasing the cost by an additional 33% above the wages paid at the union shops³⁸. Finally, jobbers could only enlist as many contractors as were necessary to produce the jobbers' goods. JAs represented a comprehensive regulation of wages, hours, and working conditions. For the employer, it simplified things by taking wages and benefits out of the competitive equation. Companies could, however, still compete in respect of design, quality, sales operation, purchases (such as textiles), and the management of business.

These agreements transformed industrial relations in the sector. They precluded labour cost competition and recognized, through legislative and legal precedent, that the jobber was the “actual, if not legal, employer” of garment workers, not the subcontracted factory (FTC 1955). These and the aforementioned effects combined to curb the domestic fluidity of capital, answering the core dilemma over subcontracted labour that is now a global problem.

JAs heralded a new epoch in the life of the U.S. garment worker. Dramatically improved trade union density had led to dramatic improvements in factory conditions and living standards. By 1938 *Life* magazine, in a “Garment Workers At Play” cover story, declared that the era of sweatshops had ended: “thirty years ago ...[the garment industry] stank of sweatshops” and now “the sweatshop is virtually gone.” By 1939 the contracts with the ILGWU were worth nearly \$350 million (Wolfson 1950), a sum made even larger when considering

³⁸ Phone Interview, Jeff Hermanson, former ILGWU Organizing Director, August 12, 2013

the low capitalization of the garment sector.

By ensuring that buyers share in the responsibility for workers' rights, and exerting pressure through workplace agency and collective bargaining, JAs occasioned an almost exponential growth in union membership. Even in the mid-1950s, when American union density was at its domestic post-war peak of 35%, a full 70% of garment workers were unionized (Whalen 2008). Today, however, the garment industry is one of the most difficult to unionize.

Early in the 20th Century, firms began popping up outside the production epicentre of Manhattan (labeled "runaway" or "out-of-town" shops), in other cities along the east coast. During the 1920s and 1930s there was an exodus of shops to Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts. Then U.S. Labour Secretary, Frances Perkins, wrote in 1933 that jobbers were contracting in neighboring states because their "labour laws were less stringent" (Pasachoff 1999, 76); as a result, they received nearly all the work of New York jobbers (Wolensky, Wolensky, and Wolensky 2002). Relocating the garment industry has always been easy, as Sol Chaikin, ILGWU president from 1975 to 1986, explained; "it can be moved overnight because capital investment is low, machines are easily transportable and materials are comparatively light. Clothes are not steel, not copper, not lumber, not cement, not brick" (Wolensky et al 2002, 25)(Wolensky et al 2002, 25). But the obvious value of JAs to local workers and their modularity allowed ILGWU organizers

to successfully “chase the work”, and retain a 60% density across the Northeast³⁹.

From the 1940s through on into the 1960s a confluence of factors including the northeast labour shortage concomitant with WWII, large government contracts for military uniforms, the success of JAs, and the passage of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act (1947), served to open the door for the relocation of factories so-called “right to organize” states in the northeast to “right to work” states in the south, and regions in southern California⁴⁰. As the ILGWU continued expending resources, “chas[ing] the runaways”, unions’ negotiating power had begun to wane and the quality of contracts declined⁴¹. Sears, the large retailer, set up a contractor, Kellwood Inc., to produce most of their goods in Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky--states which the ILGWU was still trying to crack into during the 1960s. The ILGWU was, however, successful in unionizing a segment of Kellwood and winning a CBA from contracting firms that were empowered through its agreements with jobbers (who had now become retailers) like Sears. Only 10% of southern and southwestern (TX and southern California) firms were eventually unionized, compared to 60% in the northeast (NY, NJ, CT, PA, MA, RI) and 35% in the “Upper South” (VA, MD, KY) and Midwest (IL, WI, IA, OH, IN, MN). Despite a general weakening of domestic union power, the ILGWU’s demands continued contributing to many successfully negotiated agreements. Meanwhile, cities in

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Harvey (2014) claims that by the 1960s labour unions were pushing for the centralization of workers’ rights which led to big capital ensure the ongoing decentralization through “states’ rights.”

⁴¹ Phone Interview, Jeff Hermanson, August 12, 2013

Canada- Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, even Winnipeg--maintained high union density and a strong ILGWU presence. But though Jobber's Agreements continued to operate in Canadian production, local employment protections were relatively strong, making it an unattractive destination for runaway firms.

Initially the ILGWU used "bottom up" organizing strategies to force non-union jobbers to sign Jobbers Agreements. In several instances the ILGWU declared a general strike of all the contractors in a particular industry to organize non-union jobbers and use the momentum created by the power of striking workers to "clean up" the industry and sweep up any non-union contractors. However, by the 1970s the ILGWU began to resort to more "top down" strategies, with an overreliance of retail pickets, returning to clandestine shop floor organizing in the late 1980s⁴².

Globalisation of the industry was incremental, but the 1963 adoption of Item 807 of the U.S. Tariff Code was a tipping point, opening the borders to capital flight. It allowed U.S. firms to export cut fabric abroad and reimport the assembled and finished products duty-free (except on value added). Item 807 created tariff breaks for capital expenditure and raw materials sent abroad. This led to a boom in the cutting rooms of southern U.S. cities like Miami and El Paso and an exponential expansion in sewing factories in free trade zones on the Mexican border and in the Dominican Republic. Through a protracted campaign of organization and strikes (a few four years long), the ILGWU was finally able to establish JAs that covered these cutting facilities under post-Item 807 conditions (Hermanson 1993). For example, Calvin Klein.

⁴² *ibid.*

In the 1980s clothing brand Calvin Klein established a 150-worker cutting facility in El Paso with sewing in Mexico. The ILGWU unionized the cutting facility, but did not attempt to organize sewers in Mexico. The story of Calvin Klein in El Paso is representative of the ILGWU's larger failure to think beyond the border, dooming the JA strategy, and garment workers with it. Mexico's *maquiladora* system grew in tandem with Item 807, then extended beyond the border to the rest of Mexico, with the passage of a 1972 law (J. L. Collins 2009). While wages and conditions within the sector had matched those of autoworkers in the 1950s and early '60s, by the '70s and '80s, after a dramatic drop in unionization, the garment sector had become one of the least worker-friendly industries in the country. As cutting facilities, too, began relocating in the late '80s, the border seemed still a barrier too high for the ILGWU. As former organizing director Jeff Hermanson recalls, "the 'runaway shop' was a forerunner of globalisation in that it required the development of the communications and logistical infrastructure that was further developed in cross-border production." Currently the global apparel supply chain operates through "bottlenecks", or economic monopsony, through which jobbers (brands and retailers) cast a multitude of small sellers into competition with one another for contracts. This allows the jobbers to set prices for products. Despite the more recent changes in scale, the essential relationship between workers, factories, and jobbers has remained unchanged during the last hundred years.

In 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was established to

replace and expand the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Whereas GATT was committed to free trade, it nonetheless exempted Textiles and Clothing, Service and Agricultural goods. The WTO rid itself of these exemptions to promote freer trade with intellectual property, services, textiles and clothing (Kiely 2005). By the late 1990s, outside of haute couture producers, the Jobber's Agreements, and the U.S. garment industry as a whole, were on their last legs; victims of a paradigm shift in capital mobility that had cultivated a vast, *now global* network of sweatshops. Between 1990 and 2004 alone the number of workers employed in the textile or clothing-manufacturing sector in the U.S. contracted by 60% (Moran 2010). And in 2005, the coup de grâce: expiration of the Multifibre Agreement (MFA) removed the last remaining restrictions on trade in the garment sector (Elbehri 2004).

The ILGWU and its inheritors, such as the anti-sweatshop movement, have continued organizing in the U.S., at points of consumption, but the previously mighty union is on the decline. As capital began reproducing itself globally, the ILGWU (in its new incarnations UNITE, UNITE HERE, and then Workers United) was already devoting the bulk of its resources to maintain its hold on the fast-fading U.S. garment sector. The last Jobbers Agreement was negotiated in 1996.

Jeff Hermanson⁴³, the ILGWU's former organizing director, who worked with the union from the mid-'70s to 1997, helped form the International Union League for Brand Responsibility ("League"), and its core demand for a global

⁴³ Phone Interview, Jeff Hermanson, August 12, 2013

jobber agreement – to be discussed in greater detail below. Hermanson argues that jobbers and brands must be forced to the table by shop floor pressure:

“In my experience, in order to force a brand or jobber to accept an all-inclusive agreement of the ILGWU type, it is necessary to mount a campaign that constitutes an existential threat to the brand or jobber and threatens to put them out of business. However, we were often able to get a partial jobbers agreement, covering a portion of a jobbers' contract factories, by causing significant economic and/or reputational damage, even though the existence of the business was not in danger. For an economically rational brand management, the question in such a case boils down to whether it costs more to continue to fight or to settle.”

In the 1990s, following the failure of the ILGWU's to meet the challenges posed by globalisation, workers and unions besought governments to join together in the creation of an international agreement guaranteeing worker rights and protections (Hensman 2011). If the postwar welfare state represented the historical apex of state-based regulation, the neoliberal era marks its deepening nadir. Just as Reagan-era neoliberalism removed the floor under the American regulatory apparatus, Clinton-era neoliberalism effectively refused workers' seat at the table altogether, ensuring regulatory impotence amid the emerging new economic world order.

Several governments did attempt (half-heartedly) to protect workers' rights through “social clauses,” usually as side agreements to trade agreements like NAFTA, and voluntary “codes of conduct” drawn up unilaterally by TNCs, and monitored and implemented by third-party organizations (both non-profit and profit-making enterprises) that actively excluded labour unions (Liubicic 1998). Trade union-led governance initiatives often incorporated the

“organizing” and campaign models of unionizing. These attacked profits at the points both of production and consumption, as the ILGWU had done. But unlike the ILGWU, which had organized industry-wide actions (Hermanson 1993), the U.S.-led anti-sweatshop movement attempted to address industry-wide concerns (i.e. demanding factory disclosure), while the result were largely limited to addressing problems at factory at a time (Krupat 2002). Nonetheless, there were successes. By using codes of conduct to support shop floor organizing, workers won the first CBA by a Mexican independent trade union at the 1,000-worker Korean-owned Kukdong apparel factory (Hermanson 2012), in addition to codes assisting Latin America cross-border campaigns (Rodriguez-Garavito 2005). The anti-sweatshop campaigns of the early 2000s followed the same pattern. Workers would organize, brands would end orders; the organized factories would be shuttered, activists in the north would retaliate; brands would deny responsibility, and factories would often close again soon after. The 2005 Hermosa factory shut-down in El Salvador and the 2006 Gina Form Bra shut-down in Thailand were high-profile cases (despite Gina workers forcing the brand to pay into the severance), but the results remained the same.

There is a growing consensus that organizing remains critical and voluntary private governance initiatives such as corporate codes of conduct are not only unenforceable (Blackett 2000), but are frequently part of a larger corporate marketing strategy (Seidman 2007), and/or designed expressly to prevent trade union involvement on workers’ rights issues (Fruendt 2004; Roman 2004). In a blistering critique of codes and audits in the garment sector,

an extensive report by the AFL-CIO (2013) found that twenty years of initiatives had done little but provide corporate cover for declining wages and deteriorating factory conditions. In lieu of alternatives (or imagination), codes have been invoked as a “necessary evil” (Gregoratti and Miller 2011, 87). And so, as Kearney noted, the ITGWLF has set its sights on International Framework Agreements (IFAs), to shore up weaknesses in the codes. The demonstration of worker power through organizing, locally and internationally, boycotts and industrial action, has its origin within the confrontational tradition of North American industrial relations, but has hitherto been limited in geographic scope.

Globalising the European “Social Model”

In Europe garment-sector trade unions developed a different kind of transnational model from their U.S. counterparts, based on their own nationally bound system of industrial relations. The appearance of new world production systems and a deterritorialized legal order convinced European trade unions that state labour protections would need to be internationalized. The first such agreements obtained in the automobile industry during the 1960s, when U.S. companies began offshoring to Europe. Company councils, consultative committees made up of workers and management charged with implementing labour agreements expanded to some 60 in number during the 1970s but waned just as quickly with the weakening of the regulatory power of the social democratic state (McCallum 2013).

In the 1970s, Charles Levinson, general secretary of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, and General Workers' Unions (ICEF), later the ICEM, proposed introducing representative bodies of workers into major globalising industries. This would entice TNCs to come to the table with international union bodies, and cover company subsidiaries. Studies located the failure of the Levinson strategy in its pursuit only of coordinating international trade union activity and never pursuing international collective bargaining (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000).

The first International Framework Agreement (IFA)⁴⁴ was signed in 1989 between the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF)⁴⁵ and Danone, a French-based international with 86,000 employees. It was heralded as a new tool in the fight for workers' rights (D. Miller 2004). As with the IUF-Danone agreement, over 80% of IFAs have been signed with European TNCs, reflecting the European approach to industrial relations embedded in the IFA (Papadakis 2011). IFAs are bilateral agreements between a GUF and a TNC, often based on ILO Core Conventions, emphasizing freedom of association and the right to collectively bargaining (Papadakis 2011; N. Hammer 2005). Unfortunately, IFAs rely on the voluntary participation of the TNC and only sometimes their suppliers, and do not formally bind suppliers to processes of collective bargaining (McBride and Teeple 2011). IFAs merely made clear the TNC's intention to respect workers rights, and were negotiated from above to permit organizing efforts (Hensman 2011).

⁴⁴ Sometimes referred to as "Global Framework Agreements"

⁴⁵ The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IUF) is based in Geneva

Globalisation has exacerbated the asymmetry of power between labour and capital (Bronfenbrenner 2007; McBride and Teeple 2011; Munck 2008; Sassen 1999; B.J. Silver 2003). So while IFAs may operate under a supposition of neutrality, without the additional presence of what Fung and Wright (2003, 260) call “adversarial countervailing power” or “a variety of mechanisms that reduce, and perhaps even neutralize, the power-advantages of ordinarily powerful actors,” this is only nominal and delusory. Countervailing power can take many forms; workers can withdraw their labour through industrial action; they can build leverage through corporate campaigns. Fung and Wright (2013) maintain that the formation and maintenance of transnational collective bargaining must include a strategy challenging the power of TNCs--otherwise a lack of countervailing power from below calls into question both the motivation of TNCs to sign agreements and the capacity of agreements to be enforced.

So what motivated TNCs to sign IFAs? Initially, IFAs were pursued with TNCs possessing a long history of partnership with unions at the national level, based mostly in Europe (Dan Gallin 2008). These TNCs usually put up little resistance and the agreements operated as an extension of their traditional labour policies. Niklas Egels-Zandén ((2009)) finds that GUF involvement in governance is “symbolically important”, that TNCs sign IFAs to retain their positive internal relationship with trade unions and not out of fear of economic or public consequences. Papadakis (2009) also finds that IFAs rarely come of protests and mobilization, and almost never result from strikes or industrial actions. Rather, the impetus behind an IFA can usually be attributed to the

“benevolence” of an “enlightened” top manager, already committed to the “virtues of social dialogue” (Papadakis 2009). Like codes of conduct, IFAs offer a “public relations triumph” (Stavis and Boswell 2008). The motivation for signing IFAs is therefore not the same as for signing domestic CBAs; generally CBAs are wrung from intransigent employers by worker actions that are inherently antagonistic and coercive, and can even present an existential threat; IFAs are corporate gestures of accommodation designed to present a positive and benevolent image, which the TNC expects will rarely if ever be tested.

Similar conclusions are found in a ILO (2009) study assessing management views on IFAs. The study surveyed a quarter of all companies that had signed IFAs, finding that that these had gained credibility, reducing risks to their investors and shareholders, even though IFAs are, by and large, informal and non-binding agreements. In fact, it was argued that IFAs have little to no impact on company profits, given that the associated costs (training, information dissemination) are easily absorbed by pre-existing ‘corporate social responsibility’ budgets. Herein lies a fundamental question: how can workers’ wages and conditions improve at almost no cost to capital?

In the 1980s, International Trade Secretariats worked in conjunction with the UN as a channel to reallocate resources from workers of the Global North to those of the Global South Mathiason (2007). It was not until 2002 that, coinciding with the growth of IFAs; those secretariats started calling themselves GUFs. Underfunded and embedded in a culture of European “social dialogue”, GUFs are decidedly staff-run (i.e. thoroughly bureaucratic) enterprises, possessing few links to rank-and-file “membership” and little

means to acquire them (McCallum 2013; Traub-Merz and Eckl 2007). Unlike national CBAs, IFAs are never negotiated or ratified by the membership of the GUFs. (Examples of GUFs organizing workers from below against a hostile employer exist (McCallum 2013)--the GUF UNI-led campaign against security contractor G4S, for instance--but are exceptions.) Nor do GUFs represent a united front; rather, they're often divided not only on spatial, but also on ideological and sectoral grounds (Cumbers, Nativel, and Routledge 2008). However, unions of the Global South have at times held sway⁴⁶. But on the whole, GUFs have mostly proven capable of shaking down the willing, and have yet to sufficiently prove their capacity to build international campaigns that oppose capital.

IFA advocates start from the position that rectifying poor working conditions under neoliberalism requires a universal application, operating beyond individual nation-states (D'Antona 2002), and filling a "democratic deficit" in global governance (Niforou 2013). The establishment of such new rules is especially important regarding Export Processing Zones (EPZs), where freedom of association either does not apply or is purposely not enforced. The supranational institutions currently in place, such as the ILO, offer no replacement for state regulation. According to Edo Fimmen (1922), the original purpose of the ILO was the creation of an international regulatory framework for labour, which would "not merely adopt international conventions without binding force but should pass international laws." The ILO, however, "failed to

⁴⁶ A case in point is found when South Africa's powerful National Union of Mineworkers compelled the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) to adopt policies in support of transnational "sympathy strikes."

realize the high hopes of an international labour parliament with legislative and executor powers” at its foundation (van Voss 1988, 524).

Despite the abundance of recent literature on IFAs, few researchers have explored how workers themselves attempt to bargain with their transnational employers, let alone union experience in efforts to organize in vertically disintegrated supply chains. This dearth of research may be explained by the limited data available regarding attempts – or successes -- at organizing internationally and demanding cross-border agreements. As detailed in this brief history, attempts at international collective bargaining have been largely limited to the upper echelons of bureaucrat-run labour organizations, with few successes, especially in labour-intensive sectors like apparel and footwear production.

There is a clear disconnect between GUF or TNC actions and the workers or subcontracted suppliers in the periphery of production chains (Croucher and Cotton 2009; Papadakis 2011). Theoretically, GUFs push for partnership agreements to build external pressure that will strengthen local organizing—the so-called “boomerang model” (Keck and Sikkink 1999). Though Greven (2008) sees transnationalism--on paper, at least--as a result of diminishing union power, a dependency on transnational agreements reveals the weakness of global and local unions alike.

Smith (2008, 8), a national organizer with British trade union GMB, describes the decision by the GMB to categorically reject “top down” partnership agreements within the domestic sphere, as an approach that “fail[ed] in its goal of organizing workers simply as it more often than not

resulted in workers being approached by the union and management together after a deal had been struck.” Composed in inflexible language, not accounting for local specificity, IFAs, according to Smith (2008, 8), reflect only the concerns of management and a union bureaucracy remote from the shop floor, whose language frequently “come out of the same Wall Street legal firm.” They represent a movement towards top-heavy union culture, which deploys a *Field of Dreams* strategy to organize workers - the “if we build it, they will come” method. Smith (2008, 9) concludes that “our global campaigns will fail or become hijacked by corporate interests if we attempt to impose collective bargaining in an organization without the industrial strength to see it through. Or if we seek to apply organizing models from one corner of the world in every place at every time.” The motives for signing IFAs, McCallum (2013, 43) claims, may be more insidious: “Most damning of all, because IFAs are technically joint ventures, occasionally it is the carefully crafted agreement language itself that serves to redirect workers activity toward channels that are acceptable to both union leadership and business interest, without workers ever having been consulted.”

Most IFAs are in capital-intensive “producer-driven” industries (Gereffi 1999; Hammer 2008)—i.e.: vertically integrated production processes with direct investment costs that workers can leverage to increase their negotiation power--and remain largely absent from labour-intensive sectors, like garment production. Despite their growing popularity (91 had been signed by early 2013; up from 5 in 2000), even the strongest IFAs do little to hold employers accountable; nor can it be said with certainty that they cultivate stronger or

more active unions (McCallum 2013). Even the 2008 UNI-G4S security guards' agreement, which triumphed over company resistance to the establishing of a security guard union in Bangalore, one of the most successful IFA-assisted efforts, led leaders to conclude that the IFA's role in negotiations was negligible--"a waste of paper that we cannot afford" (McCallum 2013, 134) that hamstrung the ability of local unions to take more militant direct action, possibly breaching the agreement.

A chief organizing strategist for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which deployed the IFA strategy against G4S, Stephen Lerner (2007, 32) has himself said that:

"The time for these types of global framework agreements has come and gone. These general statements of principle are too weak and it is proven that they cannot be enforced. They should be abandoned in favour of agreements with language that concretely helps workers around the world win a union and higher standards. These new agreements should be part of plans to organize companies on a global basis to establish unions where they aren't as well as rebuild union strength in open shop countries where membership is in decline."

There are successful cases nonetheless. Jane Wills (2002) found that, even without workplace conflict or democratic input, the IUF-Accor IFA was used to assist efforts to organize in the hospitality sector, that the strength of an IFA was predicated on the strength of the relevant local union (aside from enforceability, IFAs are often dependent on sector-wide union support (Anner et al 2006). In a nutshell, the weakness of IFAs consists in a model of management-worker cooperation, resembling the post-WWII labour-capital

compromise (Munck 2008)—a failure of imagination that plagues trade unions to this day (N. Egels-Zandén 2009).

The primary obstacles to negotiating IFAs in the garment industry have been outsourced production and intense employer resistance. According to Welz (2011) only 9% of existing IFAs apply across the supply chain. The ITGLWF's first IFA in the garment sector was a backroom deal, years in the making (Miller 2008). Miller (2008) claims that the proliferation of the auditing regime in early 2000 and the resulting factory disclosure by major brands finally gave the ITGLWF what it needed to proactively pursue IFAs. The 2005 collapse of a knitwear factory in Bangladesh, killing sixty-four, led to a series of discussions between a major buyer, Spanish clothing brand Inditex, and representatives of the Global Union Federation ITGLWF. In 2007, Inditex⁴⁷ signed an IFA with the ITGLWF--the first and only IFA in either the garment or textile sectors and the first IFA to cover the entire supply chain (ETUF-TCL 2007).

The ITG-Inditex IFA has created new opportunities for training collabourators between Inditex and Turkish trade unions (Korkmaz 2013). One former researcher for ITG Turkish affiliate union TEKSIF⁴⁸, gives his take: “The agreement had no positive or negative effect on the union or workers until around three years ago when a new pilot program targeted at Inditex suppliers was initiated by ITGLWF's successor IndustriALL [...] this is a pilot, but I'm sure

⁴⁷ Inditex is one of the world's largest clothing companies, notable for its ownership of the brand Zara. The company owns 6,000 retail stores in 86 markets, with over 1 million workers producing in 40 suppliers countries (Inditex Group 2012).

⁴⁸ Phone Interview, March 17, 2014

we'll expand it and it will assist our trade union organizing." But despite Turkey's importance to Inditex, as one of its largest producers, with optimum turnaround times and convenient proximity to EU markets, Turkish unions were not consulted during the drafting process. The TEKSIF researcher continued, "When the ITG was formulating the IFA they did not consult TEKSIF. The problematic side of the IFA approach is that it came out of top-level negotiations, except maybe some Spanish unions since Inditex is a Spanish Multinational." In another instance, the agreement led to the reinstatement of dismissed workers in Peru but failed to reinvigorate the union, which remained stagnant and weak (Doug Miller, Turner, and Grinter 2011). In another case, the agreement was unable to combat what a recent probe has called "slave labour" conditions in Argentina (Roper 2013). The agreement did have an impact on white-collar workers, at Inditex headquarters in Spain, at the top of the supply chain⁴⁹. But like other IFAs, the Inditex-ITG agreement does not include a commitment to enforcement, only a mechanism for consultation.

Gregoratti and Miller (2011) have conducted the only known analysis on the impact of the Inditex-ITG IFA, focusing on River Rich, Inditex's primary supplier of knitwear from Cambodia. In January 2007, the Coalition of Cambodia Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU), an ITGWLF member, asked ITGWLF to pressure Inditex on worker dismissal, full-time recognition, and maternity leave at River Rich. This set of demands, ignoring higher piece rate and other wage factors, was shaped by the ability of River Rich to pay, which itself depended on what Inditex was willing to give. The IFA does

⁴⁹ Interview with IndustriALL employee, July 23rd, 2014.

not question market supremacy, but only establishes a process to address concerns. As Gregoratti and Miller (2011, 96) put it, “clearly, sourcing policy and purchasing practices are variables over which the IFA approach, at present, have very little say;” the changing world economy has revealed the “limited authority CSR departments have in commercial decision making.” Gregoratti and Miller found agreements rarely applicable beyond short term, immediate concerns, such as an unfair dismissal, leaving systemic and structural inequities unaddressed.

River Rich represents an early test case for IFA applicability, and as yet the only detailed study of Inditex compliance. Its authors highlight the conspicuous absence of language in the IFA that would bind Inditex to sourcing from River Rich, leaving workers in a difficult and weakened negotiating position. And indeed in 2010, Inditex halted its River Rich production, when it was not obliged to continue it; a stoppage that extended, in part, to the supply chain. Gregoratti and Miller (2011, 97) that the River Rich case sheds light on the weaknesses IFAs share with their predecessors: unenforceability (“a global union seeking to implement an IFA is no different from a global union seeking to enforce a multinational’s code of conduct”), and efficacy in the sector (“the fickle nature of outsourced apparel production raises serious questions about the overall effectiveness and long-term sustainability of such an approach”) (Gregoratti and Miller 2011, 85). They assert that an effective IFA must include a long-term supply agreement between the relevant multinationals and their external suppliers, a provision absent from current agreements.

C.CAWDU Vice-President Athit Kong⁵⁰ claims that his union was unaware of the Inditex IFA until after the campaign, but knew that ITG had been involved in negotiating the agreement at River Rich. Athit stated that C.CAWDU had no involvement in drafting the IFA and in fact had “never even seen the document.” Athit claims, “It was worker power that allowed the IFA to have any power. In the absence of grassroots worker struggle the IFA provides a platform for negotiation and dialogue on an international level that might not already exist. Overall it is a good thing but is not useful by itself. The important part is always worker struggle.”

Fast-forward to Cambodia in 2013, and a four-month strike at the 6,000 worker SL Garments in Cambodia, that revealed the fault lines in the agreement. C.CAWDU led the charge, establishing local unions at both of two SL Garment facilities in 2011, which by 2013 encompassed a majority of workers. C.CAWDU is a member of both the newly formed IndustriALL (which includes the former ITGWLF) and the International Union League for Brand Responsibility (“League”). The Phnom Penh factory is the largest garment-processing factory in Cambodia and a critical bellwether for the state of the Cambodian working class. The strike ended after brands were pressured by the C.CAWDU, IndustriALL, the League and the workers rights NGO Clean Clothes Campaign to force SL Garments to negotiate with the union, with SL eventually

⁵⁰ Interviewed through assistance of Liana Dalton on May 6th, 2014.

agreeing to a list of eight main demands, including reinstatement of the terminated union leaders⁵¹.

The experience at SL Garments contradicts the argument that IFAs are a useful tool for the empowerment of workers and trade unions. As one outside negotiator⁵² pointed out, “Four major brands contract with SL Garments – Gap, Inditex, H&M, and Levi’s – and Inditex has not responded sufficiently or pressured the factory to meet with workers to end the strike despite having an IFA.”

In July 2014, IndustriALL officials informed affiliated garment unions that they had renewed the Inditex-IndustriALL IFA. The renewal occurred without the involvement of affiliates, such as C.CAWDU that has been locked in an ongoing and unresolved struggle with Inditex supplier SL Garment that IndustriALL has been supporting. Instead of utilizing the re-negotiation of the IFA as leverage (e.g., conditioning renewal on Inditex first implementing the agreement signed months ago at SL), IndustriALL officials indicated that they planned to push Inditex on the issue after the agreement had already been signed, precisely when Inditex will feel the least vulnerability. By renewing the partnership with Inditex with no strings attached in the midst of a dispute IndustriALL forwent the major point of leverage that the IFA affords in the first place⁵³.

⁵¹ The strike at SL garments evolved into a national strike which was brutally repressed by Cambodian armed forces (see Teehan 2014). December 3rd Agreement was signed by SL, C.CAWDU and the Cambodia Ministry of Labour

⁵² Phone Interview, December 14th, 2013

⁵³ Based on interview with IndustriALL representative, July 10, 2014

The European “social model” was translated onto the global stage and informs the strategy of GUFs. For example, IndustriALL presents itself as “working with global brands” for the reinstatement of arrested or dismissed workers. For instance, 23 Cambodian labour activists were arrested in early 2014. Instead of launching a campaign *against* the brands who had the power to pressure their outsourcing factories, IndustriALL “work[ed] with” them to ask the Cambodian state for the workers’ release, ignoring the fundamental conflict setting workers at odds with factory owners and brands, in favour of collaboration with short-term benefits. Had IndustriALL placed the responsibility on the real power players, the brands, rather than effectively providing them cover by shifting responsibility to domestic actors it would prove a more efficacious strategy in both short and long term. But yet this approach goes to the heart of the GUFs ideology consistent with nearly a century of practice.

Because GUFs strategy grew out of the Social Dialogue tradition they tend to prioritize state targets over grassroots organizing. Though postwar Europe was initially a favourable climate for the cultivation of union power under this model (largely because of the power of labour in the aftermath of WWII), the subsequent innovations of capital have gradually exposed its fundamental weaknesses, its top-heavy and entropic structure, far removed from the shop floor sources of worker power. As the balance of strategic and tactical innovation shifts to capital in the neoliberal era, asymmetries of power between GUFs and TNCs only widen.

Hensman (2011, 285) argues that real global collective bargaining requires that unions “evolv[e] a network structure rather than a top-down one,” which, “using alternative means of communication, including the Internet, would facilitate a discussion of objectives and strategies that are genuinely in the interests of all workers and that cut across national and other differences.”

Hensman (2011, 301) describes the parameters of the Jobbers Agreements in a call for expanding current codes of conduct:

“Codes could be reshaped to include purchasing practices, specifying that companies adopting them undertake to pay prices that enable suppliers to abide by them, rule out delivery schedules that cannot be met without compulsory overtime, and build stable relationships with suppliers so that they can invest in upgrading labour standards without fearing that their buyers will shift to cheaper suppliers. This would result in pressure to suppliers to invest and upgrade labour standards without fearing that their buyers will shift to cheaper suppliers. This would result in pressure to change being brought to bear on the companies that profit most from the labour production workers yet are inaccessible to collective bargaining by them. Including these issues, as well as workers’ rights, in binding contracts between buyers and suppliers would enable both sides to take legal action in the event of violations by the other and would also allow unions to intervene.”

The Framework for a New Jobber’s Agreement

On February 10, 2013, as activists in Manhattan protested Adidas’ runway show at New York Fashion Week, unions representing workers producing Adidas products in Indonesia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, India, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic were delivering a letter to their bosses. They were announcing the formation of the International Union League for

Brand Responsibility (“League”), and demanding that Adidas agree to collectively negotiate a brand agreement, mirroring the jobber’s agreements of old, directly with workers (IULBR 2013b).

Internationalizing the campaign for a Jobbers’ Agreement (JA) came from the Honduran union federation Central General de Trabajadores (CGT), allied activists, and organizations that grew out of the success of the earlier Fruit of the Loom campaign (Kumar and Mahoney 2014). Campaigners were emboldened and prepared to substantially widen their scope of operations, confident that their model could be spread to other countries⁵⁴.

Confirming their intuitions, the JA model soon gathered steam across Central America. With the assistance of former campaigners from the U.S.-based United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), it spread even farther, to unions in Argentina, India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Turkey and Indonesia. From established unions affiliated with IndustriALL, such as C.CADWU and TEKSIF, to newer autonomous unions, like South India’s GATWU, a desire to form coalitions against unified targets became integrated with effective use of new communication technologies.

Advocates for global governance understand the obstacles to establishing workers’ rights under globalisation—the decentred state, the weakness of the ILO, etc. But as legal scholar Adelle Blackett (2000, 402) stresses, “workers’ rights advocacy surrounding self-regulatory initiatives simultaneously understands, problematizes, and reinforces dominant

⁵⁴ Based on interview with CGT leader Reyna Dominguez (August 31st 2013) in Kumar and Mahoney (2014)

conceptions of the globalisation process,” failing to meet the fundamental goals of labour law.

After exploring potential legal hurdles, Allie Robbins (2011, 151) concludes that “adopt[ing] a strategy of pursuing jobber agreements is .. the logical next step,” for the anti-sweatshop movement. And yes, agreements can be made in national level courts, as the 2009 CGT-Fruit Of The Loom agreement established, stipulating enforceability in U.S. and Honduran courts; and the 2013 Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, stipulating enforceability through the courts of the defendant’s home country or a court of competent jurisdiction (Kumar and Mahoney 2014; AFBSB 2013). In other words, if there was a global JA in place and then a dispute arose in Indonesia filed against Adidas, it could be contested in either Indonesia or Germany, or even the U.S., if the goods are intended for sale in the U.S.

The new jobber’s demand borrows the core provisions of the old⁵⁵. It includes an arbitration process and the resolution of disputes to designated arbitrators. If either party fails to observe the arbitrator(s) decision, it can sue for breach of contract in any court of competent jurisdictions⁵⁶. During arbitration process, the text of the contract takes precedence. The expectation is that the contracts specify the choice of law – that is, what jurisdiction’s decision would be relied on to interpret the contract where ambiguities exist or

⁵⁵ Based on interviews with League leadership and staff (October - December 2013).

⁵⁶ It is possible that the JA would be limited to the home country of the complainant party or defendant party; or, it could allow US courts as a universal option, which might be desirable given US courts have significant precedent in its courts related to jobbers agreements.

a contract provision is unlawful in the local jurisdiction⁵⁷. The “organizing model” alone and employed domestically, must be fit to the scale necessary to gain leverage over subcontracted and transnational configurations of capital. What distinguishes this demand for JAs is an intuitive combination of IFAs’ “global” reach with the antagonism of the “organizing model.”

The JA proposal reaches along both directions of the supply chain, beyond garment worker organizing, to include ancillary suppliers. A few League member unions represent clothing retail and warehouse workers as well, a foothold which could be expanded strategically, applying additional upward pressure on the supply chain. In February 2013, for example, SAE-A, a Korean manufacturer and Wal-Mart supplier, was brutally suppressing the organizing efforts by members of the Nicaraguan League affiliate FESTMIT members (WRC 2013b). Wal-Mart contract workers then led a delegation to SAE-A offices in Los Angeles and New York with the Warehouse Workers Unite, demanding that SAE-A begin bargaining with the union and all dismissed workers be reinstated (Eidelson 2013). But the League could go further than the ILGWU’s jobber’s agreements in textiles; to cover, say, workers in leather tanneries in Argentina represented by League affiliate FeTIA-CTA. League-affiliated unions represent major textile mills owned by TNCs Hanes and Gilden in the Dominican Republic, and a Hanes outsourced textile mill in El Salvador. Thus, the League could target the clothing commodity chain vertically, such as textile

⁵⁷ The League sought assistance in drafting the legal parameters of any agreement from a Yale Law School’s Transnational Development Clinic. Legal understanding of the jobbers are based on interviews with Mary Yanik of Yale Law School’s Transnational Development Clinic (March 12th 2013)

facilities that are either owned by, or provide a bulk of their materials or components to, major TNCs, to be included in a future global JA.

The JA strategy endeavors to expand union power beyond the first-tier production sites to the rest of the supply chain. Then negotiating with a brand, the League decides which workplaces to prioritize, regardless of where they fall in the supply chain. It's a question of power. If warehouse workers in Los Angeles and retail workers in Argentina take industrial action with workers elsewhere around the globe, the League can fight for brand agreements including clauses relevant to all workers involved. But the core of the agreement – the concept of designated contractors – applies primarily to production sites. Naturally, a brand could make binding commitments related to worker demands at stores it owns (i.e.: Walmart and Adidas both own stores in Argentina). The brand could (at the very least) commit to terminate its relationship with any warehouse that does not accept the union, while taking stock of local considerations (e.g.: for a textile or leather facility, Adidas could enjoin its suppliers to use material from other suppliers until a union dispute is resolved).

Of course there will always be challenges. The Designated Suppliers Program, a 2005 United Students' Against Sweatshops (USAS) initiative, attempted to channel consumer power, through licensed university apparel, to create space for the workers producing the apparel to organize. This included a set of labour rights qualifications but no specific plan for organizing workers, substantially limiting its ability to recruit factories into its "Designated

Suppliers Program”⁵⁸—that, and an accusation that DSP violated anti-trust laws (before passing legal muster years later (USJD 2011)). The ILGWU’s JA strategy crucially included retail boycotts, to supplement shop floor organizing. As Vogel (2005) claims, consumer boycott campaigns rarely influence consumer trends or corporate profits, and indeed are “more bark than bite,” and useful only as a tactic secondary to worker organization.

Are Jobber’s Agreements applicable internationally? Several ILGWU jobbers had contractors in Canada, and several Canadian jobbers had American production sites, and both were covered by the agreements; and the legality of this practice was never challenged or litigated. Jobber’s agreements in the 1980s and 1990s also had provisions requiring payment of “liquidated damages” to the union for production in other countries, on the theory that this production “damaged” the union, diminishing job opportunities for ILGWU members⁵⁹. Unknown variables notwithstanding, the recognition of jobbers as employers with shared liability for the conditions, rights, and wages of garment workers was enshrined in the 1959 Garment Industry Proviso, which was legislative provision that exempted garment workers from the prohibition on secondary boycotts or hot cargo clauses (Winefsky and Tenney 2002).

⁵⁸ A September 2006 memo from the DSP working group lists only 5 possible DSP-qualified factories, showing the severe lack of qualified factories: Lian Thai (Thailand), Mexmode (Mexico), PT Dada (Indonesia), PT Kolon, and BJ&B of the Dominican Republic (Closed in 2007 BJ&B but went on to become a Knights Apparel subsidiary and Living Wage CSR-project Alta Gracia in 2010 (Kline 2010)).

⁵⁹ Although, it can also be argued that the liquidated damages provision for imports prioritized the bank balances of unions in the Global North over the rights of the outsourced workers in the Global South. The provision prioritized the millions of dollars generated in liquidated damages rather than ensuring outsourcing conditions that included freedom of association for the foreign contractors.

The League strategy is a longer one, intended to turn weaknesses into strengths gradually, through campaigns on *both* local and international fronts. The League is also engaged in cross-border political pressure in the Global North, “naming and shaming” brands as a form of what Keck and Sikkink call “accountability politics” (1998; 1999). Organizers believe the cumulative economic effect will be sufficient to extract a jobber’s agreement from Adidas.

The ILGWU tactic is only distinguished from that of the League by scale. Whereas the ILGWU had sought full unionization of contractors, to cover entire production networks (1,200 outsourced garment factories in the Adidas clothing commodity chain), the League’s limited resources have confined its demands to applying agreements where there are active organizing campaigns⁶⁰. This global jobber agreement would cost brands significantly less than the original (as percentage of total profit), making it more palatable as a means of averting industrial actions and anti-corporate campaigns that can sully expensive marketing efforts. And though benefits may not be as extensive as ILGWU members previously had, the wage provision would take into account local and differential application of a living wage. Lastly, an agreement has the potential to give unions access to other plants, extending union neutrality to all producers in countries where workers are represented, similar to the CGT-Fruit of the Loom agreement in Honduras.

League unions target not only brands but direct employers as well. Day-to-day industrial relations, however, are a matter to be negotiated in the factory-level CBA. Targeting specific employers instead of their governments

⁶⁰ Interviews with League staff November 2013.

allows workers in different locations and trades to coalesce around a unified set of demands. In the case of the JA, these help establish a floor, supporting a workers' movement that does not end the moment a TNC signs an agreement. Importantly, the leadership comes from the trade unions themselves, with a commitment to move more decision-making to individual representatives despite geographic, resource, and language hurdles, to build workers' power directly from the shop floor.

Building Labour's Power

The proper allocation of "rights" remains an open question in international law. Marx (1867) famously wrote that "between equal rights"—those of propriety-possessing classes and the working classes—"force decides". In a neoliberal context, the right of capital to expand through exploitation and market exchange, while cultivating a society favourable to this end, is pitted against the rights of workers to self-determination and collective action. "In the history of capitalist production," Marx continues, "the determination of what is a working-day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, *i.e.*, the class of capitalists, and collective labour, *i.e.*, the working-class."

Governance regimes' attempts to curb the outsized power of corporate actors—as inventive as they've been--have failed resolve the fundamentally unequal power relationship joining capital to labour. The problem, Fung and Wright (2003, 259) emphasize, is that "such schemes are often inattentive to

problems of powerlessness and domination, thus seeming to suggest that if only the institutional designs can be constructed just right, then gross imbalances of power in the context of these can be neutralized.” Unlike top-down policy making, which can effectively disempower the affected persons, a policy from below can deepen democracy, giving, in this case workers, increasing say in policy formation. Fung and Wright (2003) consider a relationship vis-à-vis the state, but JAs weave democratic practice and empowered participatory deliberation through the entire process, from conception to implementation.

Andre Gorz (1967) developed the concept of “reformist reforms”, superficial concessions that actually further consolidation power in the hands of the already-powerful, as compared with “non-reformist reforms”, intermediate objectives that create structural changes, consolidating working class power. These Gorzian concepts have been a bright-line test for the radical efficacy of transnational social movements, like the “global justice movement” (Bond 2004; Bond 2008).

Through a Gorzian lens, “social models” and IFAs form a mode of transnational activity distinct from that of JAs and the U.S. anti-sweatshop movement. JAs are conceived as grassroots struggles, developing out of the shop floors, the streets and shantytowns, where new forms of union organization are taking place. Lacking the institutional support of a GUF does pose its own problems for the League, namely questions of resources and legitimacy. But on the other hand, it means the League is not bogged-down by

the routine and bureaucracy that plague GUFs, and can pursue unconventional methods in a dynamic fashion to reach the shared goal of collective bargaining at a global scale; and the direct participation of the factory-level and national unions in the decisions and processes of the League is itself a powerful legitimacy of a different kind.

Conclusion

Modern labour history is a history of workers jockeying with capital for power, and the primary method of building worker power has been through collective bargaining. In this context, the IFA represents a classic case of “reformist reformism”, serving as a means to ease the implementation of neoliberalism, exemplifying global labour’s defeatism by dwelling on what Gorz (1967) calls “what can be” rather than “what should be.” The return of the JA strategy at a global level presents new possibilities for challenging TNCs, allowing workers to organize and magnify their power and demands, by weakening capital as a “structural reform.” And though the campaign is new, and there remain untested variables, the early signs are auspicious. League member unions have already managed to intensify efforts on the factory floor, reinforcing international solidarity (IULBR 2013b).

GUFs today, beholden to a tradition of “social dialogue”, persist in pressing states to establish Multi Stakeholder Initiatives, bringing unions, companies, and civil society organizations together to improve worker protections. The League, meanwhile, has honed its crosshairs on jobbers

instead, concentrating its efforts, with the U.S. anti-sweatshop movement, on transnational brands.

There is an unfortunate and ahistorical assumption that, before capital globalised in the 1970s, unions had agitated only against their immediate employers, ignoring, or unaware of, any larger contexts. As detailed above, workers in the U.S. garment sector had long ago displayed their intuition in this regard, anticipating capital flight and pursuing staunchly grassroots initiatives. The (legally binding) JAs succeeded in: contractually locking in both jobber and contractor, dismantling the “auction block”, ensuring the “pass through” of value from jobbers through contractors to workers, and strengthening worker solidarity across the sector. But by the late 1990s, trade union membership in the Global North was in steep decline. Gathering clouds or no, U.S. unions had cut their teeth on organizing during 40 years of neoliberal onslaught, and the innovative methods of survival developed therein were still--on occasion-- remarkably effective. They had acquired a hard-won familiarity with the new, even more unsympathetic industrial relations climate, and were capable of using it to good effect. This form of labour campaign--the “organizing model”-- soon defined American labour strategy, and was later exported.

Both the IFA and JA strategy proceed from analyses of the garment supply chain as a “buyer-driven” sector, in which brands and retailers set prices (and therefore wages) while outsourced suppliers compete for brand orders (Gereffi 1994; Gereffi 1999). This configuration obtained within the context of

an evolving world economy subject to swift and sometimes radical changes. But since the phase-out of the global quota arrangement known as the Multi-Fibre Agreement introduced new volatility to the sector in 2005, the garment industry has become especially vulnerable to these vicissitudes. Subsequently, production has consolidated, as larger suppliers absorbed smaller ones; and those large suppliers expanded vertically across the supply chain to textiles, cut-sew-trim, warehousing, logistics, and even retail. This has led to quasi-monopolization among suppliers, creating greater value capture at the bottom of the supply chain, and more capital expenditure at the supplier-end into innovations in technology and production processes, creating even more value capture⁶¹. The relationships this leads to between buyer and supplier, are ones of *mutual dependence* and these dynamics inform strategy. Greater value capture at the supplier-end lessens the power brands hold over prices but also, however, creates more possible bargaining power for workers at larger suppliers, independent of brands. But even if the balance of power, in which contractors increase their influence vis-à-vis brands, shifts, both parties will remain significant players, and need to be engaged--ideally though a triangular, JA-style bargaining system. Just as the ILGWU targeted the “backbone shops”--the large contractors that jobbers depended on for competitive edge -- League unions might do well to target the “backbones” of today, while putting the screws to TNCs.

⁶¹ This is found especially in capital-intensifying footwear. China's Pou Chen Group is the largest casual footwear manufacturer in the world producing 250 million pairs of shoes per year and accounting for 20% of the world athletic and casual footwear market (Arnold 2013). Pou Chen is one of Nike's “strategic partners” but what the ILGWU would call a “backbone shop” because it offers economics of scale and agglomeration unmatched by any other supplier. Thus, rather than purely “buyer-driven”, both Nike and Pou Chen are mutually dependent.

Though some evidence suggests a social model approach has been effective within the borders of some European nation states, a global strategy requires a flatly democratic methodology, collapsing the distance between the global negotiating table and shop floor power. Otherwise, the asymmetry of power in industrial relations will render agreements between labour and capital unenforceable. The “organizing model”, invoked by anti-sweatshop campaigns, and so concretely successful in contesting the power of TNCs, has been historically effective, but hitherto limited in scope to the U.S. and Canada. The “jobber agreement” approach organized workers across the garment commodity chain in order to build power for all the workers whose labour it took to produce clothing, from the factory floor to the retail rack, and to internally regulate an industry structurally inoculated from top-down regulation. If the “organizing model” and the “jobber agreement”—each the complement of the other, in terms of strengths and weaknesses—were synthesized, the resulting campaign—global, but anchored in, enforced, and administrated by workers themselves—could open the door to the prospect for transnational collective bargaining and create a new and promising front in the struggle for labour rights in the global garment sector.

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Chapter 6: Interwoven Threads

Building a Labour Countermovement in Bangalore's Export-Oriented Garment Industry

Keywords: industrial relations, garments, resistance, gender, identity, organising, international solidarity, Bangalore

This paper approaches globalisation as a contradictory and dialectical phenomenon, one in which the tools of exploitation are being subverted into instruments of labour resistance. Through a study of the Garment And Textile Workers' Union (GATWU) the paper observes how feminised workplaces are bringing to the fore issues of gender oppression, flexible conditions are expanding union organisational capacity and the universality of capital has led to transnational links between workers. While the global neoliberal regime weakens traditional paths to unionisation, it has concurrently facilitated alternative strategies of worker organisation and resistance. GATWU members both battle immediate economic issues while transforming worker organisation from an atomised factory workstation, to assembly line, to outside the factory gates, and finally into social movement and transnational spaces. The research takes note of how GATWUs organising strategy both compliments and conflicts with struggles of gender and class, the local and global.

Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself...Capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation

- Karl Marx (1867)

The era of late capitalism and neoliberalism witnessed the large-scale relocation, or 'globalisation', of capital from the Global North to south resulting

in dramatic changes in emergent 'global cities'⁶². Within late-neoliberalism burgeoning cities in the Global South are at the receiving end of the transformation from peasant to proletariat, from proletariat to precariat, from public to private, are now being reconstituted from centres of production to spaces of consumption. This has led to incalculable misery, but has also facilitated new forms of social and economic struggle. The mounting downward pressure of globally fluid predatory capital alongside gendered workplaces compounds superexploitation with oppression, whilst simultaneously opening up vistas and innovations of resistance in the new international division of labour.

India's traditional trade unions were able to proliferate under capital's previous manifestation, which was marked by import substitution industrialisation, a well-regulated industrial relations system and a sizeable public manufacturing sector. However, conventional methods of organisation/unionisation have failed to make inroads in a global garment sector that embodies some of the most extreme conditions of the neoliberal workplace. The export-oriented garment sector remains heavily 'feminised' with women comprising a disproportionate number of the factory's lowest rung; is highly 'flexibilised', meaning employment is increasingly open-ended and the work-force temporary; and with outsourced production the sector remains one of the most 'globalised' in the world (Angela Hale and Wills 2005). These factors have made the sector largely insulated from the establishment of

⁶² The author is grateful for the valuable feedback provided by Linda McDonnell, Craig Jeffrey, Danny Dorling, Adam Elliott-Cooper, Musab Younis, Charlotte Gerada, and Amber Murrey-Ndewa in an earlier version of this paper

workers' rights, a fact not limited to India, and have led to contracting wages, ineffective bargaining and the almost universal obsolescence of unions in the global garment sector (Ballinger 2009; WRC 2013a).

It is within the backdrop of feminisation, flexibilisation, and globalisation that garment workers began to look for innovative methods by which to organize. The paper begins by outlining a geographic and economic history of Bangalore. It is through this lens that the paper argues that the position of workers under globalised and flexiblised capital has seen Bangalore's garment workers incorporate a strategy of community and gender-based organising alongside internationalism, which are not borne out of romantic illusions of international proletarianism but out of necessity and out of survival. The paper maintains that the internationalism grows out of the mobility of dis-integrated transnational capital, and similarly gender-based community organising arises out of internal capital mobility, urban spatial change and the feminisation of the industry. Indeed, decentralised and agile trade union strategies are a reaction to a decentralised opponent.

Marx (1867) argues that subjective agency is borne out of the working class whose location in production gave them the power to act and that the very force of hardship (partially) precipitates revolt. The paper supports a number of Marxian claims, but, in addition, maintains that it is workers' agency that leads to innovations within capital, concepts conceived by the Italian political theorist of the *Operaismo* ('workerism') and popularised by some world systems theorists and labour geographers (B.J. Silver 2003; Herod 1997b; Tronti 1966). The innovations of capital are, in part, a response to the subjective

agency of labour. Indeed, contemporary changes in capitalist production unearth their own methods of resistance (Hardt and Negri 2005). Arguing that innovations of capital are shaped by the actions of labour and that labour is also shaped by capital, the paper traces the historical geography of capitalism and analyses the global garment sector in particular.

Since the mid-2000s, members of Bangalore's Garment And Textile Workers Union (GATWU), as part of a new network of trade unions and social movement organisations have begun injecting into the landscape their own spatial vision winning power from below against the employer, the state, and, most significantly, against transnational capital. The union has reached beyond spheres of material production (factory floor) into social reproduction (home/community) in order to resist capital at disparate vantage points. Their campaigns are transcontinental and cross-sectoral: they attempt to organize workers at the disparate points of production and consumption, opening new avenues to resist an intensifying global race to the bottom.

This paper outlines the ways in which GATWU has incorporated strategies of traditional trade unions as well as NGOs, to build collective power on the shopfloor and shantytown, on issues beyond the workplace, while developing organic links with international allies to successfully increase union density and win material gains⁶³. The paper looks at three phenomena: feminisation, informalisation, and capital fluidity, to understand how obstacles to traditional trade unionism can open up new avenues to build labour's power through unconventional methods.

⁶³ Officially recognized as a union in 2006, GATWU has gained significantly, with 6,000 members in over 300 factories.

The strategies employed by GATWU expose 'globalisation' as more of a double-edged-sword than either defeatist organized labour or triumphant organized capital will admit. Seen dialectically (*ex malo bonum*: the idea that good things sometimes come out of very bad ones), what began as a mechanism to counterweigh capital's profitability crisis (Harvey 2005) is now exposing its own duality. Marx maintained that capitalism's central contradiction of bringing workers together to amass ever-larger profits resulted in the coalescing a workers' struggle, as capital's toilers evolve into its own gravediggers. However, sectional divides and geographic unevenness meant that working class organisation fought only for their immediate advances rather than longer-term change, union members rather than the working-class as a whole (Gindin 2014).

Karl Polanyi states, 'for a century the dynamics of modern society was governed by a double movement: the market expanded continuously but this movement was met by a countermovement checking the expansion in definite directions' (1944, 130). Now such 'countermovements' are showing early signs of transforming liberalised borders into labour internationalism, feminised workplaces into intersectional devices, and disrupting flexibilised practices by utilizing them as a means to expand shop-by-shop and into the community. In a practical application of Karl Polanyi's 'double movement', GATWU subverts the tools of exploitation in their organising to the 'actually existing working class'. After decades of failed attempts to make in-roads in the most gendered, outsourced and mobile sectors, Bangalore's garment workers are now

presenting their own coherent and organic opposition, transforming instruments of immiseration into ones for liberation.

The research is based on six months as a participant observer, working as a labour organizer with GATWU between 2012 and 2013, as well as weekly follow-up calls with GATWU organizers into 2014. I remained a Kannada interpreter for International Union League for Brand Responsibility ('League') conference calls. In the summer and autumn of 2014 I revisited Bangalore for a four-month period to understand the outcomes of GATWU's campaigns and take-part in ongoing struggles. In addition, during my research I doubled as a interpreter on factory investigations for the Workers' Rights Consortium, an independent labour monitoring organisation, which gave me unique access to the factory floor and allowed me to ask questions of company managers and security guards. The study also compiled data from primary sources like court cases, union meeting notes, and district labour office documents, alongside thirty-five interviews with workers, trade union leaders, factory owners and brand representatives.⁶⁴ Some information was gathered through freedom of information request due to legal suppression orders (also known as a 'gag order'), such as the FFI/JKPL-CCC case.

Bangalore's Labour Landscape

Asia's surplus population and low-cost materials drove the engine of global capital into the new century and led to a 'great doubling' (Freeman 2005) of the

⁶⁴ All of the interviews in this paper were translated from Kannada by the author. Some of the names have been changed to protect identities and prevent possible employer retribution.

global labour force since the 1970s. Karnataka, India's eighth largest state by area and its ninth by population (with roughly 55 million people) has been a case study in neoliberal structural adjustment for over two decades now. Modern neoliberal vernacular has even begun using verbs like 'bangalor'ed' (a general term for lay-offs caused by outsourcing) emphasising the high regard in which the state of Karnataka and its capital city Bangalore are held by investors as a 'global city'. Further, Bangalore has seen the greatest feminisation of labour in India, in which 85% Bangalore's garment workers are women (Chetty 2012), and continues to enable rapid capitalist development due to its abundance of cheap and flexible labour (Manish Tewari 2008).

Bangalore's postcolonial industrial development can be described in three phases. The first phase began in the 1940s when Bangalore became a ministerial city and saw the establishment of a large public sector, primarily in defence manufacturing. Each of these factories was spatially scattered, employing thousands of workers across the city. Disaggregated spatial production led to an expansion of the city.

The next phase, beginning in the 1960s, transformed Bangalore into a centre for higher education with many research facilities, colleges, and important business and engineering institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science. This development led to an influx of students to the city from other parts of India and a expansion in infrastructure. By this point the public sector workers, which had developed robust trade unions and job protection could now afford to send their children to become engineers in these budding education centres, with students receiving training in Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) and Electronics. Soon these public bodies and schools alongside cultural institutions began to form their own synchronised agglomerated clusters. This development made Bangalore appealing to international capital, easing the transition from a tech capital to a 'global city'. The final phase, starting in the 1980s, was the culmination of the previous developments and the introduction of a series of market reforms which led to an influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in both labour intensive blue collar sectors such as the garment sector, as well as labour intensive white-collar jobs in call centres and as ICT specialists. Each phase has built on previous stages whilst at the same time cleared the ground for new terrains of profitability. As an All India Trade Union Congress AITUC leader⁶⁵ stated, 'Through a series of reforms, such as the introduction of the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, they were able to kill off public sector manufacturing'.

Most trade unions in India are affiliated to the twelve labour federations and almost all of these are highly bureaucratic, centralised and embedded within one of India's many political parties (A. Hammer 2010). One notable exception is the independent federation New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) that formed in 2002, under the banner of 'Internationalism, Democracy, and Militancy', announcing a break from the rigid, politically entrenched sectarianism that plagued India's traditional trade union federations in order to agitate effectively. The NTUI, of which GATWU is a member union, brings together several independent unions around the country with leaders from various different tendencies from Leninists to Maoists, to social democrats, and

⁶⁵ Interview, January 27th, 2013

the so-called 'Ghandian socialists' (*see* Hensman, 2011; Menon & Nigam, 2007; *NTUI - Report of the Founding Conference*, 2006). Some, however, are not buying the hype: One AITUC leader⁶⁶ in Karnataka claimed that the NTUI would never be taken seriously until they affiliate to one of the political parties, saying 'it is bound to get politically aligned sooner or later. Trade unions cannot stand without political support'.

Trade union activity in the garment sector is based in the four primary garment industrial centres in India: Delhi, Tiripur, Chennai and Bangalore. However, independent factory-level unions and collective bargaining in the Indian garment sector remain almost entirely absent. The practical experience of garment trade unions begins at the point at which they attempt to gain recognition at a factory after reaching a union membership density of 10% of the workforce. The recognition of a 'charter of demands' has the practical effect of a binding agreement reached through collective bargaining between management and workers. But in Karnataka not a single garment factory has had their charter of demands successfully recognized. As GATWU organizer Pratibha attests, 'every single charter of demands we've submitted results in the immediate repression of workers at the factory, with our leaders being intimidated or dismissed, making it impossible to sustain the union and to win collective bargaining'. After the unions submits a registration application under section 6 of the Trade Union Act of 1926 to the office of Registrar, a phone call is usually made from the District Labour Commissioner to factory management. GATWU organizers suspect that management is informed of the

⁶⁶ Interview November 9th, 2012

details of the application in which union leaders are disclosed. This results in the leaders' employment being either illegally terminated or forced to leave 'through a payout or a campaign of harassment'. Factory management use a number of methods to suppress union activity. If attempts to break the union internally are unsuccessful, factory management is known to use the local police force and hired gangsters or thugs to intimidate or assault workers and their family members⁶⁷. Sometimes factory management simply institutes an illegal factory lockout of union leaders and members⁶⁸.

From Production to Consumption

To understand the ability of workers in Bangalore's garment sector to gain power a deeper analysis of the position of garment workers in global dis-integrated supply chains is necessary. Beverly Silver (2003) references Erik Olin Wright's work in differentiating the two sources of workers' power: associational and structural. Associational power is sourced from collective organisation usually through trade unions or political parties, whereas structural power is obtained simply through the position of particular workers in the economic system. Structural power is broken down into two forms. The first is what Silver (2003, 13) calls 'marketplace bargaining power' which is based on labour market limitations: one example can be found in Bangalore's skilled ICT workforce in which a selection of the labour force possess the scarce skills demanded by employers. The second form is based on the strategic

⁶⁷ *Interview*, Pratibha from GATWU, December 16th, 2012

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

location in the economy. An example of this type is found with dockworkers that are able to conduct a large-scale disruption in circulation since ports cannot be relocated. Historically, the export oriented garment sector are more 'globalisable', with disintegrated value chains, and low-capital intensity, meaning that garment workers remain largely outside Wright and Silver's notion of structural power. Instead, gains within the sector have historically tended to come about through associational power (Kumar and Mahoney 2014), which have also been severely undermined by the hypermobility of capital under globalisation (B.J. Silver 2003). This hypermobility has also helped accelerate the growth of 'global cities' in the Global South.

Since 1991, an in-flow of capital and labour resulted in a dramatic transformation of the social and economic geography of Bangalore and its surrounding areas. Indeed, Bangalore remained as a key site of export-oriented production throughout the 1990s, it emerged as a city reconstituted for consumption. Through state-sanctioned land grabs, public-private partnerships, speculative development and the selling off of public land (Halbert and Rouanet 2013), Bangalore is undergoing a process, of what Harvey (2014) calls 'neo-haussmannisation', just as Paris' was under Georges-Eugène Haussmann's direction in the late-1800s. The process redefines capital-labour relations and reconfigures the city to optimise a consumption-oriented landscape mediated by a 'middle manager class'. The city is transformed into, what Henry Lefebvre (1991) described as, erected for the benefit of the 'rentier class', in which workers are transmuted into 'maggots in the rotting apple', dislocated from the core fleeing to the 'periphery' (symbolically and

geographically), refitting the metropolis from a source of production into a point of consumption.

Bangalore has undergone its own a relocation of production in recent years. Since 2009, large export oriented garment suppliers, such as Shahi, Bombay Rayon, Gokaldas Exports, and Go Go International, have relocated production out of Bangalore to neighbouring cities due to a combination of labour market and macroeconomic policy rationales. Crucially, garment factories in Karnataka tend not to be in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), other than in the Hassan district, with entire regions assuming EPZ-like conditions through changes in macroeconomic state policy. Unlike many Delhi-based firms, where production networks are subcontracted to a number of smaller producers, relocating adds enormous 'sunk costs' for Bangalore's large garment firms. The three primary reasons for such relocations, described further below, are labour deficit, increasing property prices, and state policy.

First, beginning in 2006, Bangalore began to experience labour scarcity in both the skilled sector (Rai 2006) and the unskilled sector (FLA 2012). What had been a worker surplus feeding frenzy in the 1990s saw FDI outstrip labour in Bangalore within two decades. Now workers find work in the sector with little effort.

Second, the ICT industry contributed to a real estate boom that has led to the relocation of industrial capital first to outskirts of the sprawling area and and then to neighbouring and regional cities. But the conversion of Bangalore from a site of production to one of consumption began in 1985 when then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the Textile Policy (Srinivasulu 1996)

decentralising the textile industry, which witnessed a 'corporate planning' policy which transformed Bangalore's large textile factories, many located in the city centre, to shopping malls, high-end restaurants, super-specialty for-profit hospitals, five star hotels, and luxury apartments to service the consumption practices of the middle class (Heitzman 1999). Much has been written about the effects of these policies on Mumbai's textile industry (Date 2006; Mukhopadhyay 2005) with little attention brought to similar consequences that befell Bangalore's textile industry. For example, Bangalore's Minerva Mills, Raja Mills, and Binny Mills employed more than eight thousand workers. Here, militancy can be traced back to India's anti-colonial struggles when workers undertook large-scale industrial action against British occupation (CB 2010). By the early 2000s, these mills were closed down and dismantled, with the land rights leased to well-connected private investors under the auspices of 'public-private partnerships'.

One apt example is found at Mantri Square, a shopping mall that opened its doors in 2010 as one of the largest in the country. The mall, built on the site where the textile factory Mysore Mills once stood, neighbours the wealthy residential area Kumara Park and Sheshadripuram and is owned by the Hindu-nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporting Venkaiah Naidu and Sushma Swaraj. The developmental and democratic process interweaves with patronage networks, particularly around traditional powers, a relic of colonialism further institutionalised in the post-colonial compromise (Cohn 1996). The two most powerful families in Bangalore that also own and operate

many of the shopping malls in Bangalore are Mantri and the Prestige Group⁶⁹.

Employees in these new developments are sometimes the very same workers

who once laboured on the textile factory floor. Mantri Mall security guard

Rajanna⁷⁰ once worked at the Mysore Mills site as a machine operator, stating:

They closed the mill down even though production and profits remained high. I worked there for five years, our union was strong, and we went on strike to prevent the closure but to no avail... Today I receive Rs. 200 a day as an old watchman at the exact location where I received Rs. 1000 a day as a young factory worker... this is my karma.

Unlike the textile mills that were located in the centre of Bangalore, the garment industry emerged in the city's periphery. The shuttering of Bangalore's textile mills and the ongoing relocation of Bangalore's garment factories is an expansion of the domain of rentier Bangalore to beyond its outer rims and a privatization of urban space.

Another potent symbol of this massive transformation is found in the booming private healthcare sector. Companies like HealthCare Global Enterprises Ltd. (HCG) a chain of private cancer treatment centres, is part of a larger valorisation of Indian healthcare (Chakravarthi 2011). Silk production and distribution sites once lined Sampangiram Nagar's roads but have been replaced by the glistening HCG Towers, which have seen soaring profits and expansion, with a clientele that serves Bangalore's elites alongside a burgeoning health tourism market (Kaur, Vaidya, and Bhargava 2007). Nonetheless, the

⁶⁹ As one community activist stated, 'the Mantri family has always been with BJP and the Prestige Group leads directly to [Congress Party leader] Sonya Gandhi'.

⁷⁰ *Interview* February 6th, 2013

CITU officials, whose organization's headquarters operate under the shadow of the HCG Towers, talk of making organizing in-roads with cleaners and other staff in private healthcare companies like HCG.

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Thirdly, Karnataka state government policy has incentivized production to move out of Bangalore. Between 2009 and 2014 the Karnataka government introduced a five-year subsidy called 'golden fabric opportunity' (*suvarna vastra neethi* in Sanskrit) for factories built in rural areas. Karnataka state instituted a subsidy rate for factories built on 'industrially backward districts', such as Kolar in Magadi Thaluk that witnessed a sharp rise in factory construction. If a factory was 100% export-oriented there was an additional subsidy for water and electricity, as well as the voiding of the land registration fee. Additionally, minimum wage variation between Bangalore and 'industrial

backward districts' is 10 rupees a day, or 260 a month, further incentivising the shift from urban and rural.

Bangalore's shifts from a production to consumption centre and from public to private has led to a further weakening of traditional working class organisation and bases of power. Changes in the production process at the base generate their own neoliberal subjectivities at the superstructure. For instance, Bangalore shopping mall workers' sense of self now conforms to the logic of neoliberal policy and governmentality (Gooptu 2009). Retail workers are highly dismissive of trade unions, stable public sector workplaces and collective action as the failed organisational forms of their parents' generation. Instead flexible work conditions have been deployed, normalised, and discursively constructed as a career-development strategy, in which they internalise the 'enterprise form' of individual consumption, workplace upward mobility, and the thawing of class antagonisms. Under a similar logical extension, Harvey (2006; 2014) argues that forms of organisation that oppose capitalism tend to reflect the changing structures of capitalist modes of production itself. In this sense, workers in Bangalore's garment industry increasingly mirror the prevailing structure of neoliberalism away from traditional trade unions, with their emphasis on the state apparatus, political parties, and hierarchical organisation, towards horizontal, political autonomism, with a scepticism towards the state and its sectorial and national boundaries.

GATWU Organising History

GATWU has made significant inroads and dramatic membership gains in Bangalore's garment sector, however union recognition has remained a challenge. In fact, there is not a single Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in the Indian garment sector outside of Chennai where CBAs are a classic case of 'protection contract'⁷¹. In the case of Chennai these agreements merely restate the minimum wages and conditions delineated in state and national law. Minimum wages in India's garment sector operate more as a maximum wages with widespread employer intransigence in the absence of effective trade unions. In the case of Chennai, for example, many of these CBAs have been documented to have agreements below the national wage averages of garment workers.⁷² The lack of trade union recognition is especially highlighted in Bangalore where there are 1,200 garment factories and not a single recognition agreement. While trade unions can register a factory via the state, the factory owners are the only ones who can recognize the union⁷³.

GATWU was founded in 2006 by Pratibha and Jayram two former garment workers after they broke away from the workers' rights NGO called 'Civil Initiatives for Development and Peace' (CIVEDP) due to 'strategic and political differences'⁷⁴. GATWU has since grown, gaining around a thousand members a year. GATWUs entry into the Bangalore garment sector was the first

⁷¹ A protection contract is an agreement between pro-management union representatives and the company, often without the knowledge of the factory workforce.

⁷² *Interview* Manodeep Guha, South Asia coordinator Workers' Rights Consortium, January 4th, 2013.

⁷³ This is the case in every Indian state except for Maharashtra, where if a union fulfils the conditions stipulated in a state act of 1971 then the employer must grant the union the status of 'sole bargaining agent' (Hensman, 2011).

⁷⁴ *Interview* with Pratibha and Jayram October 24th, 2012

effort by a union since the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPM)-affiliated Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) attempted to organize Ashoka Exports, owned by German Edith Kumar of EK brands, in 1999. Ashoka Exports was the largest factory in Bangalore and CITU had organized nearly all of its seven thousand workers into the union. The factory closed in 2000 and while there is an ongoing court case, ‘the family holding the ownership of Ashoka Exports is no more’ and ‘no one comes on behalf of the management and no one is available to proceed with the auctioning process, making remuneration for workers an onerous process... [CITU] have not attempted large-scale unionising of garment workers since Ashoka’⁷⁵.

These events, together with a lack of trade union organisation, led NGOs to step in to advocate for workers. One NGO employee, who had previously been an active trade unionist but now worked with an organisation that assisted construction and garment workers described the NGO method as, ‘friendlier techniques to relate to workers. They do not resort to pressure tactics of trade unions such as *bandhs* [general strikes often called by affiliated political parties], demonstrations, and threats. These NGOs act like trade unions, providing benefits without putting pressure’⁷⁶. Some see NGOs as the only vehicle by which to establish workers’ rights in the garment sector. Narayana Chetty⁷⁷, Chair of Labour Research at Bangalore University, claimed that, ‘trade unions have failed to unionise garment workers; whenever strikes

⁷⁵ Interview, CITU official, October 23rd, 2012

⁷⁶ Interview, January 7th, 2013

⁷⁷ Interview November 23rd, 2012

have been organized they have always failed. The only organisations that have made any progress in the sector are the worker-friendly NGOs’.

Whilst class antagonisms are clearly articulated by many left-wing trade unions, namely the CITU and the Communist Party of India (CPI)-affiliated AITUC, NGOs tend to veer away from class confrontation. Instead NGOs frequently direct their energies towards initiatives such as microcredit, self-help groups, women’s empowerment and entrepreneurship, often working alongside state agencies and corporate actors (RoyChowdhury 2005). Indeed, whilst some NGOs have been lauded for work on women’s rights (Madon and Sahay 2002), they have also been heavily criticised as being funded by the very corporations they are supposedly organising against (Incite! 2007), with little internal democracy (Gitau et al. 2010) and operating mostly as charities with little critical engagement with ‘class’ (RoyChowdhury 2005).

Despite GATWUs critiques of the NGO method, political independence opens up its own class tensions and contradictions within GATWU. For example, one of the key organising methods that GATWU uses is offering workers the option to join microcredit schemes, or so-called ‘self-help groups’, a holdover of its NGO beginnings. These schemes have been condemned for indebting the poor as a deceptive substitute for genuine welfare provisions (Chatterjee 2008) and for being irreconcilable with organising on a political or class basis. As one CITU leader stated, ‘some of these new unions tell people about self-help loans, we don’t do that... Why are both the large companies and these unions offering workers these loans? It means trade unions move away from militancy towards bureaucracy. Heavily indebted workers will not strike’.

In lieu of trade union organising in the sector, NGOs began to get workers together into associations. As one NGO employee⁷⁸ indicated to me: ‘we are not a union. We fight for workers, we get workers together, but we don’t believe in violence and we aren’t imposing our political agenda on them’. But seen another way, a Bangalore based CITU official⁷⁹ responded: ‘These NGOs serve themselves. Who funds them? Some rich person? Some American? Some company? They exist to support the rich. They are not a union, funded and supported by workers – its members’.

Gender and Class

Work in ever society is gendered, and India is no different. In one illuminating interaction (Jobs with Justice 2007), a Gurgeon factory manager explained the reason they prefer women on the shop floor:

Researcher: why are your workers mostly female? Are there significant differences in productivity?

Manager: No, no significant differences in productivity. Just, men together tend to form groups and lobbies because they have spare time.

Researcher: I don’t understand. What groups?

Manager: Oh, they get involved in politics...women are easier to handle. They’re docile; easier to control.

To an outside observer it makes little economic sense for factory owners, who are almost all men, to actively seek out women for their workforce, after all the additional costs of providing a legally mandated crèche for large female workplaces caring for children (Factories Act 1948) or maternity leave (Maternity Benefit Act, 1961) has disincentivised the hiring of women (Frankel

⁷⁸ Interview October 22nd, 2012

⁷⁹ Interview December 12th, 2012

1997; Rangaraju and Kennedy 2012). However, the benefits of hiring a workforce amongst whom workplace control and low pay is a social expectation makes the economic benefits high and the liability associated with workplace action low (Ghosh 2009). Decades of women-only hiring practices have resulted in deeply gendered factories: highly skilled tailors, security guards, and managers are positions filled by men, whilst cutters, tailors and helpers (the lion's share of the factory workplace) are now seen as 'women's work' which is always characterised as 'unskilled'.

Yet the acute feminisation at the behest of global capital compounds existing gendered social norms and issues of gender and class are interwoven within the factory. Women cut, sew and clean what men design; women operate machines that men service, women work on the factory floor whilst men stand guard, women toil while men manage, and so forth. 'Women's work' invariably results in less pay than what is defined as 'men's work'. Within the factory women constitute the lowest rung of work, and this status is utilised to justify low wages⁸⁰. Company policy rigidly preserves gendered demarcations, which engenders an additional form of antagonism between different types of workers.

In order to resist the inherent inequity of gendered workplaces, GATWU has attempted to use this apparent drawback advantageously. As Mangala, a seamstress at a leather good factory on Mysore Rd stated, 'We are trying to organize the union, but some skilled tailors don't want to join us because they are above us, the security guards are with the management who beat our

⁸⁰ For detailed work on the notion of gender and skill see Phillips and Taylor (1980)

brothers and husbands, they are men just like the management, and we are women, we organize as women workers because that is who we are'⁸¹.

Trade unions often mirror the patriarchal factory and larger society. Rohini Hensman (2011, 22) claims that in her studies on Indian trade unions women are heavily disadvantaged, where the number of women in meetings 'could be counted on the fingers of one hand or, at most, two'. Hensman continues that, 'it goes along with the notion of the working class that ignores the work done in the home (mostly by women) and with a notion of class struggle that marginalises working-class women and children and fails to challenge the gender division of labour and relations of domination and subordination between men and women'. Indeed, tension between class and gender as a target of garment organising is found around the world in which much of the union bureaucracy and leadership are men while the workers are women, a reality observed by Mark Anner (2011, xvii) in his research of the garment sector in Latin America. Rohini Hensman (2011, 22) attests that throughout her research on the Indian labour movement it 'showed very clearly that the problems of women as wage labourers could not be separated from their subordination in the family and broader social oppression, and therefore a labour movement that neglected these latter concerns (domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination, for example) was not genuinely representative of the working class as a whole'. Indeed, within the Indian context gender oppressions are further compounded at the intersection of caste, religious, and linguistic background.

⁸¹ Interview December 23rd, 2012

Being borne out of the NGO-fold has heavily influenced GATWUs organisational strategy. Consequently, gender oppression, which remains peripheral in the strategic and theoretical analysis of established unions, plays a central role in GATWUs praxis. In a radical departure, GATWU combines its organising with community-based third-sector organisation *Mahila Karmikara Munnade* (simply 'Munnade'⁸²) or the Women's Garment Workers Front. Munnade was formed in 2004, and educates about and responds to domestic violence, sexual harassment at work and patriarchy in the daily lives of female garment workers. Munnade is housed in a separate office and a shared organizer to address issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination at the workplace, as well as debt and domestic violence at home. Munnade and GATWU organizer Madina Taj⁸³, a former factory worker at Texport Overseas, maintains that gender, and its intersection with class, remains the first entry point, 'most of the membership of GATWU came through Munnade. Women's issues and the economic issues are of equal concern to our members, but sexual harassment is often what workers want to confront most pressingly'.

One reason for GATWUs membership growth is a result of this bifurcated organising strategy. The approach breaks sharply with Bangalore's traditional method of trade unionism where, at most, women's caucuses remain subsumed within the union. Nirmala⁸⁴, a worker at an apparel distribution centre, described her experience with Munnade and GATWU:

⁸² Munnade translates directly to 'forward moving'

⁸³ Interview March 6th, 2013

⁸⁴ Interview November 3rd, 2012

In the area we live in a women worker had family violence issues and it was confronted by members of an organisation made up of other women workers who fought, not outsiders coming in. That is when I heard about Munnade and I joined, and most of the women in my section joined as well. Shortly after we became activists in the GATWU union.

A greater emphasis on organising women by trade unions in Bangalore reflects larger changes in the labour market. Although traditional trade unions have failed to make in-roads in Bangalore's garment sector they have made membership gains in other historically marginalised sectors. For example, CPM-affiliated CITU has doubled their membership in Bangalore in the past decade and of the 250 thousand members 150 thousand are women. As the organized sector has been increasingly converted into the unorganized sector, and the public sector has become valorised towards private profits, some trade unions have successfully left the security of the industrialised and public sectors, entering areas of the labour market they historically avoided. As one CITU leader⁸⁵ stated, 'the destruction of social protections, contractualisation and privatisation has meant we are now organising construction workers, domestic workers, rolling 'bidis' (rolled tobacco) workers and even peasants'.

Flexibility Expanding Organising Terrains

'Globalisation' has been widely documented to have accelerated the 'informalisation' or 'flexibilisation' of the labour market, a standard in the garment sector (Mezzadri 2010). Informalisation has resulted in the growth of a workforce largely unregulated without legal access to benefits (Benería 2001)

⁸⁵ Interview December 12th, 2012

empowering management to set the employment terms, resulting in labour market insecurity, restrictions on collective bargaining, temporary or short-term contracts, and a reliance on migrant 'reserve army' (Rohini Hensman 2011). Deindustrialisation in the Global North resulted in the emergence the 'precariat' class (Standing 2011), whilst in the Global South flexibilisation resulted from intensified industrialisation (D. Chang 2009). In both cases it has dented workers' solidarity, undermining existing trade union power, and left workplaces largely impenetrable to traditional models of organising (Campbell 2013; Standing 2011). However, flexibilisation has also witnessed the emergence of organising strategies that go beyond the sharp edges of labour-capital conflict over wages and employment, into new realms of activism on issues of domestic violence, education, health, and housing, in which an exploited and oppressed community becomes the protagonist (RoyChowdhury 2005). GATWU's flexible organising strategies should be located within the context of a spatially segregated Bangalore, with its sharp class, caste, and linguistic residential cleavages, and in which historically disadvantaged groups disproportionately live in slums (Vithayathil and Singh 2012)⁸⁶.

Because of intensifying hostility to unions at the workplace, GATWUs organising reaches beyond the workplace to build a movement oriented toward broader community concerns of workers. The seemingly insurmountable challenge of gaining workers' power through the traditional modes in neoliberalism has meant the broadening out of tactics beyond the workplace.

⁸⁶ The proliferation of slums is nothing new to Bangalore and is typical of the early stages of industrialisation (See Engels (1987)). Of course, the persistence of caste into the industrial era is a uniquely Indian phenomenon.

Extending workers' demands from the workplace into the shantytowns where workers reside has been elucidated by social movement theorists. Seidman (1994) cites the cases of South Africa and Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s to argue that gains by labour led to innovations by capital and a comprador state. This led to the development of worker organisation outside of the workplace, what has broadly come to be known as 'social movement unionism'. Indeed, GATWU presents a union not bogged down by the routine and bureaucracy that plague many highly centralised and politically affiliated Indian trade unions. However unlike NGOs, which are rarely staffed by former garment workers, or the other unions of Bangalore, which are 'manned' by men, GATWU is led almost entirely by the rank-and-file women from the factory floor.

GATWU combines the organising traditions of NGOs and traditional trade unions and in doing so is able to utilise the flexibilised regime advantageously. For example, the informalisation of the workplace means that workers have less agency to use laws to prevent the shutting down and relocation of factories even within the state. While GATWU organizers recognize this industrial relocation diminishes the unions negotiating power, weakening its organisation in Bangalore, it has concomitantly forced the union to expand their organisational capacity. GATWU organizer Pratibha stated, '...in rural areas there is too much exploitation and very little organisation....but we have been contacted from workers from all across Karnataka, like

Ramnagara, where we have membership committees for the first time in our history'⁸⁷.

Short-term employment is a key ingredient in regime of flexibility. Temporary employment makes employment insecure inhibiting the establishment of bonds of solidarity between workers. However, as GATWU organizer Raju reflected, this has led to a shift in GATWU strategy:

My father was a CPM trade union activist in an auto factory. There you spend 20 years with the same workers; it is good to build militancy and strength but it also makes the union protectionist. It becomes harder to spread the union to other factories ideologically and strategically... Now everyone knows that all garment workers here need a union, not just one strong factory union, or no one's lives will improve. Also, we have activists who have worked in many different factories and everywhere they go they organize their unit....We've even begun asking some of our activists to work in certain factories, which would have been very difficult in my fathers time because everything was more permanent⁸⁸.

Within Bangalore the power of workers varies considerably depending on the industrial cluster. GATWU focuses on workers primarily in three separate industrial areas: Mysore Road, Hosur Road, and Peenya Industrial Area. Although the bulk of GATWUs membership is based on Mysore Road, 40% of garment factories in Bangalore are located in Peenya District. Peenya was once Asia's biggest industrial area when we started off 5-6 years back.

There are a number of spatial and demographic differences between Peenya and Mysore Road. The characteristics specific to Peenya embody both the difficulties and opportunities of garment sector organising. Workers in Peenya are younger, unmarried, newer arrivals from villages, and reside in

⁸⁷ Interview, January 12th, 2013

⁸⁸ Interview March 4th, 2013

dispersed areas. Many commute to and from the factory gates in company-provided buses. Most workers at Peenya work for only short periods, as Jyoti, a cutter in a Peenya factory, stated:

I have been working for two months because we have debts from my sister's marriage. I'm staying a few hours away with some relatives, and I'll work three more months and head back to my village after I have enough money to pay off these debts... Most of us find jobs here because it is easy to get work, but the pay is very low, none of us want to stay here longer than we need to⁸⁹.

The short-term employment and atomised places of residence mean relationships between workers are more fleeting, challenging long-term strategic organising. At the same time, the younger, unwed, newly industrialised workforce tend to be less invested in a specific workplace, with fewer familial obligations, increasing the potential for unruly, often militant industrial action and 'hot shop' organising, a reactive strategy in which the union responds to workers' agitation. As GATWU's Veena observed, 'its difficult to convince the Peenya workers to come to join the union or come to a meeting but they are far more willing to confront management collectively and directly'⁹⁰.

In contrast, Mysore Road is one the oldest of the sites of garment production in Bangalore and is where GATWU's office and large proportion of its membership are based. The typical garment worker on Mysore Rd is older with a family, many reside within walking distance of their workplace, and production cycles are far more standardised. These factors support longer term

⁸⁹ Interview October 22nd, 2012

⁹⁰ Interview March 12th, 2013

organising, as well as strengthening union through community-based networks, but these factors can also restrain militant worker action.

This poses two distinct garment production regimes. Mysore Rd retains its more 'formal' character while Peenya maintains a more 'informal' production process. These result in changes in organisational strategy as well as labour resistance. Indeed researchers such as Stephen Campbell (2013) in Thailand and Eli Friedman (2012; 2009) in China have noted that informal workplaces in large export-processing zones result in their own forms of collective informal self-organisation that while unwieldy and autonomous are manifesting their own 'politics of social disorder' (Campbell 2013, 148). Similarly, the flexibility of Bangalore's garment sector has obstructed traditional trade union methods whilst simultaneously crystallising an implicit case for cross-sectoral organising to workers, opening up new possibilities for organisational capacity and collective action.

Internationalism

The transnationalism of capital is a primary tool to undermine the efforts of workers, trade unions, and states to gain power and establish rights yet it has also seen the beginnings of its own strategic opportunities for transnational labour organisation (P. Evans 2010). Since its formation, international pressure has remained a key component of GATWU's ability to ensure dual pressure points on the direct employer from the shop floor and on the *real* employer, the brands. International links to organisations, such as the Dutch-based Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and the newly formed League, have influenced

GATWU strategies from purely 'hot shop' organising towards 'strategic organising', a method that actively goes after specific employers and brands at the disparate points of production. From GATWUs earliest days 'hot shop' organising was its primary mode of campaigning. Hot shop organising is the preferred method of Bangalore's traditional trade union as well, and is the result of capital-intensive, vertically integrated, and geographically disparate and often atomised production networks, which do not necessitate the same kind of supply chain pressure tactics. Similar to other traditional trade unions, GATWU organizers would stand outside factories and pass out information cards and contact information, and when issues arose in a particular factory, workers would contact GATWU organizers. This strategy addressed the immediate concerns of workers such as a potential factory closure, the non-payment of minimum wage, and so on.

The efficacy of GATWU's hot shop strategy is one explanation for its membership increase. Indeed, the strategy led to GATWUs first major campaign, linking GATWU with international allies, resulting in GATWU deepening networks with established workers' rights organisations. It began in 2005, when GATWU instigated a campaign at the five-unit facility owned by Fibre and Fabrics International (FFI) and its Bangalore subsidiary Jeans Knit Pvt. Ltd. (JKPL), a major contractor for transnational brand G-STAR. Exceptionally, JKPL was one of the few factories in Bangalore that invested heavily in modern machines and was said to have the highest level of production, with a large geographically concentrated workforce of three thousand. JKPL was a highly specialized jeans manufacturing plant which

included both stone washing and dying units. This relatively high capital-intensity production process could explain FFI's wariness to simply walk away from its investment, reverting to unconventional methods to repress the campaign, and the power of GATWU to place pressure largely at one unit and succeed. The issues began when GATWU and Munnade received complaints from workers in the JKPL washing unit of forced overtime and physical abuse. When GATWU intervened, even attempting to organize workers at various FFI plants across south India, their organizers were threatened with violence. At a plant in Tirupur GATWU organizers Jayram⁹¹ recounted, 'the factory hired a retired air force officer who confronted me and threatened to shoot me... he demanded to know how much money I was after and to settle the matter or face the consequences'.

After protracted management intransigence, GATWU organizers approached CCC for assistance. GATWU had developed initial ties with international labour organisations during their time at CIVIDEP. Dutch-based CCC would begin a campaign targeting the brands to stop contracting with FFI, whose largest source of production was for the Dutch-based brand G-Star.

By August 2006, CCC had initiated a corporate campaign against G-Star, placing social and economic pressure against the company, including staging pickets in front of G-Star retail shops. Shortly after the global campaign against FFI began, FFI took the unprecedented step of initiating a court injunction against the union organizers, as well as the organisation of GATWU, Munnade, SAVE of Tamil Nadu, and NTUI, which immediately drew international

⁹¹ Interview October 20th, 2012

attention to FFI and GATWU. GATWU found itself going against an extraordinarily powerful employer with deep pockets and connections. The company's lawyer in the case was Pramila Nesargi, who was an ex-Minister of Legislative Assembly in the city. Despite a number of attempts by GATWU to begin talks with management, they continued to ignore GATWU's letters, harassing workers, and failed to give legally mandated employee identity cards. Critically, a court enforced gag order prevented GATWU members and other organisations listed in the court injunction from speaking out about conditions at FFI/JKPL.

After a prolonged court battle, which involved a subsequent case filed by FFI officials against CCC resulting in both the European Parliament and the Dutch Prime Minister weighing-in on the side of GATWU members, the dispute was resolved and the case was withdrawn. While G-STAR continued its relationship with FFI, brands Tommy Hilfiger, Ann Taylor and Gap eventually ended their production at FFI. While the immediate concerns of workers were met, the protracted nature of the court campaign had taken its toll: it weakened the unionization attempt beyond repair. Nonetheless, a strategy that inculcated the power of internationalism began to crystallise amongst the members and organizers of GATWU, which informed all of their future campaigns. The case opened up GATWU in its formative stages to international workers rights organisations hungry for an independent union in the Indian garment sector that shared their commitment to internationalism.

In the beginning of 2012, GATWU was approached to join the League which was formed through the initiative of the Honduras's CGT union following their victory at Fruit of the Loom factories in 2008 (Kumar and Mahoney 2014). As of October 2014 there were fourteen member unions from countries as varied as Argentina, Turkey and Cambodia. As a requisite to joining each member union agreed to strategically organize at least one subcontracted factory that has been chosen by the unions as the target transnational brand. In the case of GATWU they chose three export oriented factories that produced for transnational brand Adidas and began organising workers at those factories in January 2013.

League-oriented organising was a further absorption of a US-led 'organising model', which had become the modus operandi of organising since the SEIU-led Justice for Janitors campaign beginning in the mid-1980s. As part of what McCallum (2013) calls the 'globalisation of the organising model', GATWU adopted forms of mapping, a process of discerning the industrial landscape and organisational terrain through comprehensive research. Mapping meant that GATWU would index the supplier companies across the supply chain in order to understand weaknesses and target critical chokepoints. The union began by surveying workers at Adidas supplier factories. This process allowed them to both gather the research they needed but also to build a list of contacts in different units within the factory. Research areas included: finding out the brands that were produced, what percentage of it was being produced by whom, labour density, where most of the workers lived, the

company's financial assets, and whether there were factories with high union density nearby. This kind of mapping also shaped GATWUs strategic vision. It allowed it to move away from a service-oriented union and increasingly towards one that was interested in expanding its membership, winning a 'charter of demands' from factories that were part of international campaigns, and increasingly saw themselves giving strength to, and being strengthened by, an international campaign.

Again, this strategy breaks sharply with that of established unions. However, one Bangalore CITU organizer⁹² remained critical of GATWUs strategy, 'In CITU we have organized workers on a political program, not by being deceptive or two-faced. People know us. They know we go on strike, they know we win for workers. We don't do things in secret. We do not tell people to sign up to some loan, or survey, or some other service, we believe that is the job of the government not a trade union'.

Unlike CITU's model of organising, GATWU campaigns begin with a phase of clandestine organising, similar to its US and Latin American partners. The second public phase occurs when the union has built-up significant density, or where the employer becomes aware of the union campaign which forces the union to go public prematurely. GATWU had also intended to organize workers outside of its home state of Karnataka. GATWU contacted their national federation, NTUI, who initiated its own covert organising strategy at an Adidas plant, known as 'salting' in North America, which, like GATWU, is made easier because of fluid and flexible employment practices.

⁹² Interview December 23rd, 2012

The League assisted in coalescing disparate struggles and put pressure on a common target, a singular transnational brand, Adidas. For example, on 7 October, 2012, workers at Adidas soccer cleat-producer PT Panarub Dwikarya in Indonesia mobilised at Adidas' Jakarta head office to rally against the dismissal of 1,300 union members who had struck after the supplier company had refused to pay the legal minimum wage. A number of League member unions, including GATWU were able to provide material solidarity with Indonesian workers and place pressure on Adidas to reinstate the workers by picketing the company's retailers in Bangalore.

Bangalore's garment workers picketing a brand shop were inconceivable even a decade ago. What brown hands produced, white bodies consumed. This was part of the design of the global economy, part-and-parcel of colonial legacies and uneven development. Consequently, there was a clear spatial gulf between where value was produced and where value was captured. Thus brand pressure campaigns required that southern workers reach out to northern consumer activists, intensifying historic asymmetries of power (Brooks, 2007). However, the League's campaigns reveal a glimpse at the possibility of south-south worker cooperation capable of placing pressure on brands at both the points of production and consumption. Concurrently, the campaigns also expose a reconstitution of Bangalore, and indeed other southern "global cities", being transformed from a city produced by the working class into centres of consumption for the middle and upper classes.



A 2012 demonstration by the Garment And Textile Workers' Union (GATWU)

Conclusion

The process of globalisation has seen union density and power fall and organising efforts thwarted; yet the number of wage-labourers globally has doubled increasing the potential power of the 'worker' as a social force (Freeman 2005). While women have been forced into wage-labour due to economic necessity, the process has also meant that addressing issues of gender oppression have become more dominant. Additionally, while the erosion of national borders in the face of globalised capital has intensified the competition among national workforces, at the same time capital fluidity, workplace uniformity, and technological advances in communication have opened up new vistas for international solidarity (Munck 2008). The universality of capital underpins the development of a universality of labour. What the Italian

operaists intended discursively, that the whole society is a factory (Tronti 1966), means that labour resistance takes on a shape not confined within the traditional factory or even within the limits of the state apparatus. Indeed, internationalism has become less about the hitherto-central symbolism of 'solidarity' and, instead an increasingly fundamental strategic asset for labourers across the world in their fight for their own survival. Established trade unions in the Global South, working within the constraints of the nation-state, have found the challenge of organising against transnational capital nearly insurmountable, especially in low-capital labour-intensive industries (RoyChowdhury 2005). In particular, a central question for workers has been how to establish workers' rights given fluidity of feminised and flexibilised transnational capital.

GATWU organising remains alive and its campaigns are on going.

GATWUs successes are minimal in relation to the broader working class but monumental to the export oriented global garment sector. The union's failure to be recognized by even a single factory may have even broadened the unions' possibilities. Indeed, such recognition often enforces and coheres to the logic of management. Independent unionism is in effect facilitated by the state and capital failing to acknowledge the union. This lack of formal legal power has stimulated a range of mutually reinforcing strategies that have helped GATWU emerge as a countermovement that gains power by organising at the points of production, reproduction and consumption.

GATWU model fuses many traditionally accepted, seemingly antipodal,

binaries between trade union and NGO, gender and class, consumer and producer, shopfloor and shantytown, strategic and hot-shop and indeed between Global North and Global South. In GATWUs attempt to challenge capital they have broadened their base within Karnataka, expanded organic links with garment workers across the Global South, and hardened their material connections with activists in the Global North. Yet one conspicuous conflict that continues to remain central to GATWUs praxis is the class antagonism between worker and bosses.

GATWUs strategies are an application of Marx's observations on the contradictory nature of capitalism. Both the assembling of workers in factories as well as the relocation of those factories have resulted in the necessary 'objective connections' (K. Marx 1867) between workers to instigate and carry on struggle. To Marx this was an outgrowth of the emergence of a 'world market', culminating in recurring crises of overproduction that only intensifies the antagonism between capital and the growing mass of producers, thus making possible the emancipation of the working class by the working class. Indeed, to Marx, without antagonism there is no progress (K. Marx and Engels 1848).

The election of Narendra Modi's BJP in 2014 will see a accelerated march away from the last vestiges of a protectionist state only to intensify neoliberal working conditions (George 2014). In this context, workers' organisational strategies are a reaction to the powerful nexus between capital and a chauvinistic state. And yet, the innovations of capital grow out of the actions of labour. History has revealed capital's capacity to accumulate by incorporating

spatial, organisational, technological or other innovations that suppress workers' struggles for organisation. Thus, it remains to be seen whether the culmination of disparate struggles, of which GATWUs' is but one important one, will be able to strengthen the power of garment workers in order to decisively challenge transnational capital in the global garment sector.

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Chapter 7: From Cotton Field to Retail Rack

India's 'Full Package' Apparel Producers, Buyer-Producer Symbiosis & Recalibrating Workers' Strategies

Abstract

The paper analyses the emergence of a new kind of apparel manufacturer in India, the 'full package' firm. A 'full package' firm expands outward, from low-value assembly-only products to high-value specialized garment production; in textiles, design, logistics, warehousing, marketing, and retail, consolidating under one corporate roof—often literally—previously discrete links in the supply chain. Historically, geographical and political barriers have separated centres of value-creation (production) and value-capture (brands and retailers) in the global garment sector. But enhanced value-capture at the point of production has led to significant upgrades in technology, giving an increasingly symbiotic character to relationships within 'buyer-driven' supply chains. Though this change aggregates the bargaining power of workers vis-à-vis direct employers, it also introduces new obstacles to workers' organisation. This paper examines a specific workers' struggle in light of this process, and through its example demonstrates the reduction of brand power in relation to full package suppliers, which give workers multiple economic targets. However, as full package suppliers consolidate supply chains, replace local workers with interstate workers, and are empowered with new accesses of surplus capital, the concomitant rise in supplier-end value capture allows garment trade unions to nonetheless demand greater shares. Thus previously unviable modes and methods have become available to workers engaged in struggles with their employers in the globalized garment sector.

KEYWORDS: India, full package, global commodity chains, labour, contractors, denim

The functionally and geographically dis-integrated garment industry is one of the most labour-intensive sectors in the world economy. Fluctuations in purchasing patterns, seasonality, and fickle 'fast-fashion' trends, require high volume production and quick turnarounds to accommodate just-in-time orders. Accordingly, for the past century, garment production has been the phase of the clothing commodity chain that brands and retailers have sought most to outsource, using high-rates of fluidity to reduce liabilities of

investment (Collins 2009). By limiting investment to bulk purchasing contracts, brand companies, such as Nike and Tommy Hilfiger, have been able to maximize profits by throwing factory owners, who have thinner profit margins, into bidding wars. The pressure of competition is then transferred onto workers, who have to work longer for less in conditions that become progressively worse. Factory floor workers are soon left weakened in negotiations with their direct employers, virtually powerless to form trade unions, obtain liveable wages, or improve workplace conditions.

This paper explores the factors in India that led to the growth and concentration of specialized garment production and the consequent transformation of relations between buyers and sellers, producers and consumers, workers and bosses. I suggest that the epochal 2005 phase-out of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) brought with it an end to the regime of 'comprador capital', which had been the dominant configuration of India's export-oriented garment firms. This comprador nature meant that indigenous garment exporters would piggyback onto foreign corporations seeking access to cheap labour and raw materials. Contrary to prevailing narratives, the post-MFA era has seen the autonomy of smaller firms across the globe weakened and gradually removed altogether by globalized competition, leaving many absorbed into larger rivals, forced to merge, or simply vanished into the red. What remains, in a handful of countries, are several mega suppliers; powerful enough to corner the supply chains of specialized products, and intensified supplier-end value-capture. Meanwhile, large retailers benefit from growing profits in the short-term, they become increasingly dependent, and the 'buyer-

driven' character of the commodity chain gives way to a kind of 'buyer-producer symbiosis.' In consequence, labour's resistance has to adapt as well.

These developments serve as updates to Gary Geriffi's formulation (1994) of labour-intensive production as an inherently 'buyer-driven' enterprise. Until recently, supplier-end companies were confined to 'cut-sew-trim' functions, but are now moving towards 'full package' multinationals that embrace the full length of the value chain, albeit in uneven capacities. I argue that the development of economies of consistent size and scale has increased capital accumulation at the supplier-end, allowing for the introduction of new technologies that cause a cascading effect down the supply chain, expanding each link. The 'symbiosis' that emerges between global buyers and producers leads to a closer integration of supplier-end capital; horizontally, as factories grow larger; and vertically, from factory to warehousing and logistics to retail. The increased value capture at the bottom of the global supply chain, where value is actually created, closes the historical and geographical gap between spaces of value capture and value creation. I explore the reverberations of this change, through production and the circulation of capital, in order to understand, too, the corresponding adaptations of workers' resistance and its effectiveness.

After an analysis drawing on my research in the South Indian state of Karnataka, I conclude that India's emergent specialized supplier firms are now better able to reorganize production in order to undermine workers' actions at a single factory, while also diminishing the leverage of brands, who are made more deeply rooted and less able to 'cut-and-run' from their suppliers. But as

entire commodity chains are gobbled up by single entities, the workers therein find themselves capable of larger scale operations, too; with the potential for multi-phasic organization allowing them to bring a full-court press against their newly amalgamated employers, and avoid the pitfalls of single factory resistance (such as isolated contingents of victorious workers becoming casualties of the market). Thus, the evolution of managerial forms in the apparel industry, as in other sectors, engenders a reciprocal evolution in labour strategies, and within the case of this paper indicated a distinct departure from traditional 'anti-sweatshop' campaigns. I illustrate my argument through an analysis of a specific 2011-2014 workers' struggle at a distribution site outside Bangalore for jeans manufacturer Arvind Group (hereinafter 'Arvind') in order to demonstrate the effects of greater supplier-end value capture on the organisation of both domestic capital and labour, as each seeks to enlarge its share of available capital⁹³.

Buyer-Producer Symbiosis

The garment industry can be divided, broadly, into multiple parts or phases from production to consumption, beginning with domain of producers such as raw materials, textile plants, garment plants, export chains (including associated logistics and warehousing), and ending with the domain of buyers

⁹³ The study is based on participant observation, primary sources of company data, and semi-structures interviews with workers, labour activists, labour monitors. Much of the company data is derived from annual reports and corporate databases such as Capital IQ. The study was conducted from 2012-2013, weekly calls with GATWU organizers from 2013-2014, and a revisit for four months at the end of 2014. Every interview was conducted in person and, except for those conducted of an English-speaking investigator from a labour organization, was translated from Kannada by the author. At the request of interviewees names have been changed or kept anonymous.

such as retail stores, design, marketing, financing and administering the process of production, distribution and sale. While the former act as the primary nodes of material production and consumption, the latter largely 'affective' phases of the production process give brands the 'directing' power over the entire system. Firms involved in each part capture a different proportion of the value generated in the commodity chain. The garment plant phase is considered a 'lower order,' or 'dead end' function, and is therefore subordinated under 'higher-order' firms with access to propriety technology, brand reputation, and consumer relations. The majority of profits are captured by these higher order firms, while the lower orders, consisting of the labour-intensive cut-sew-trim phases, are too hard-pressed by competition to expand (Merk 2008).

Table A

Basic Mens T-Shirt – Retail Price \$15		
Components	Cost	Percentage
Retail-end profit and associated costs (such as personnel, rent, administration, advertising, etc.)	\$7.50	50%
Brand's profits, overheads and advertising costs	\$3.75	25%
Garment manufacturer profits plus cost of materials, labour, overheads, etc.	\$2.00	13.3%
Transport / Duty	\$1.75	11.7%
Total Cost	\$15.00	100%

Culled from 2002 data (Vijayabhaskar 2002), Table A breaks down a proportion of the value distribution for basic men's t-shirts retailing in the U.S. at \$15 for an assembly-only producer. We see that 75% of the total value of the shirt is eaten up by the brand and retailer, and only about \$2.00 go toward the garment factory to absorb the full cost of the materials, labour, overhead involved in producing the garment alongside the producer's profits, another \$1.75 will go

toward transportation, taxes and import costs . Of that \$2.00, Table B is a breakdown of the \$2.00 ‘sourcing price’, to the garment manufacture (based on figures calculated from 2004 in Bangalore⁹⁴). Manufacturers accrue only 5% of profits, and 15%, or 30¢ (about 2% of total cost), is shared among all the garment factory workers involved in the production of each shirt. The potential bargaining power of workers from low-margin assembly-only manufacturers therefore hovers around nil.

Table B

Sourcing Price for Basic Men’s T-Shirt (2004) – Retail Price \$15		
Components	Cost	Percentage
Fabric/Silk Screen	\$1.35	67.5%
Label/Packaging	\$.25	12.5%
Labour Cost	\$.30	15%
Manufacturer’s Profits	\$.10	5%
Total	\$2.00	13.3%

Thus, the low-investment, low-capitalization garment production phase is usually the first to come and first to go, serving as a ‘starter’ for export-oriented producing countries, having played a central role in Asia’s early export-led growth, as Gary Gereffi (2002) observes. Transnational brands and retailers, through size and access to critical technologies, were able to exploit smaller globally dispersed supplier firms, and dominate the sector with ease, driving global value chains, and controlling location, output, investment, price, and employment. The large retailers and brands thereby circumscribed smaller players within the chain, limiting their ability to upgrade. In Gereffi’s classification, supplier-end producers remain largely passive victims, and as

⁹⁴ Original data compiled by Mark Francoise in 2005 (data collected by request).

marketplace pressure mounts, affected workers are rendered increasingly powerless to resist it.

The attractiveness and vulnerability of the Asian garment sector are entwined. Dis-integrated production and low capital investment resulted in a low price of entry for new garment factories, which attracted global buyers (i.e. brands and retailers) who quickly seized the reins, leaving the large and growing number of outsourcing suppliers/producers firms powerless within the global commodity chain (Gereffi 1994a). The phases of outsourcing, involving low-skill⁹⁵, low-value (ergo low wage) work, require the multiplying effects of intensification (more productive means of manufacture) and extension (higher output volumes) in order to create profits. Without the investment necessary to procure upgrades in machinery, build new factories or acquire competing firms, they were left with thin profit margins, menaced by every fluctuation in the marketplace. This takeover was an instance of what Harvey (2006) calls the 'spatial fix', wherein crises of capitalism are transferred—geographically or compartmentally—to less developed markets. In the garment sector the 'spatial fix' has taken the form of the chronic relocation of manufacturing away from the advances in labour organization, since the turn of the 20th century (Wolensky, Wolensky, & Wolensky 2002).

Gereffi divides supply chains into two categories: *Producer-driven* and *buyer-driven*. Producer-driven chains are those in which large transnational, manufactures play a central role in coordinating production networks. These chains are predominantly in technology and capital-intensive sectors such as

⁹⁵ Workplace 'skill' is a contested category and is circumscribed by gendered demarcations of labour (see Kumar 2014)

automotive, computer and heavy machinery industries. Here profitability is greatest because of high-barriers to entry limit competition, and enhance 'control over backward linkages with raw material and component suppliers, and forward linkages into distribution and retailing' (Gereffi 2002).

Buyer-driven chains are those in which large retailers and brands are decisive; often decentralized, highly competitive, networks requiring labour-intensive manufacturing such as garments, footwear, and consumer electronics (Gereffi 2002)⁹⁶. Gereffi (2002) claims that,

Profits in buyer-driven chains derive not from scale, volume, and technological advances as in producer-driven chains, but rather from unique combinations of high-value research, design, sales, marketing, and financial services that allow the retailers, designers, and marketers to act as strategic brokers in linking overseas factories and traders with evolving product niches in the main consumer markets.

Gereffi's (2002) theory is based on the assumption that 'lead firms' in producer-driven chains typically belong to international oligopolies [e.g. Ford, Boeing, Caterpillar, Mitsubishi, etc.]. Buyer-driven commodity chains [that supply brands like Nike or retailers like Gap], by contrast, are characterized by highly competitive, 'globally decentralized factory systems with low barriers to entry in production.' The advantage of outsourcing lies in narrowing the focus of brands to high-value added activities, resulting in maximum profits and minimum capital-investment and liability. Gereffi's thesis also contains the implicit premise that production and consumption are delinked, a fact

⁹⁶ To Gereffi (2002) the exception to this 'buyer-driven' straightjacket was found in Japan, where firms had moved beyond simple assembly of imported inputs towards domestic integration, joining production with design and original brand retail of their own, into a higher value-added form or "full-package" supply.

exacerbated, and spatialized, after the relocation of manufacturing during 1960s, 70s, and 80s known as globalization.

Gereffi's work is now widely accepted among Global Commodity Chain scholars. This paper acknowledges the soundness of his theories but attempts to home in on the changing materiality of supplier-end firms. I argue that the dominance of 'full package' specialized garment suppliers, once assembly-only cut-sew-trim firms that have integrated across the supply chain into higher-value sectors, is giving the relationship between 'producer' and global 'buyer' an increasingly symbiotic character, dramatically affecting power dynamics, and offering a new opportunity for every challenge it presents, for workers' resistance in the global garment industry.

Growth of Large Suppliers in Asia

India's post-reform period saw the emergence of large-scale home-grown companies in the 1990s, mostly within capital-intensive industries like automobiles and steel. Acquisitions soon became the predominant method of outward FDI. Between 2000 and 2006 fifteen companies were responsible for 98 out of 306 overseas acquisitions, or 80% of total value acquisitions (Gupta and Qiu 2013). Gupta and Qiu (2013) argue that the Indian MNCs were able to internationalize through the organization and management of value chains suitable to emerging market settings, and develop firm-specific advantages to cope with country-specific scarcity. They claim that most of the emergent companies had already developed in the pre-reform period, easing their transition to outward FDI. Arguably the most successful example of this growth

is Tata, a single auto factory that successfully entered the international market, and in due time acquired iconic British automotive brand Jaguar. For the first time, Indian capital began to compete on an international stage, not as simply a *comprador*, as in the heyday of the British East India Company, when imperial capital commissioned local merchants for extractive purposes, but as a force of its own. The first generation of capital-intensive companies has long since gone transnational, producing and distributing wherever they please. Meanwhile companies within labour-intensive sectors, like garment production, remained tied down as *compradors*, subordinate to international buyers.

The global quota arrangement called the Multifibre Agreement (MFA), which ensured a wide distribution of garment and textile production around the world, expired on January 1st, 2005, introducing massive volatility into the garment sector. Fundamental changes took place almost immediately. Apparel exports rose, prices fell, and production relocated to larger countries: China, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam (Lopez-Acevedo and Robertson 2012). Higher concentrations of production in fewer countries spurred vertical and horizontal growth in large domestic producers. The rise of large multinational garment producers based in South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and their effect on the relationship between buyers and suppliers, workers and management, is well documented (Appelbaum 2009; Appelbaum 2008; Azmeh and Nadvi 2014; Merk 2008). Azmeh and Nadvi (2014, 709) argue that 'such firms could one day challenge the power of the global buyers they now serve, and potentially become global buyers in their own right. There remains a complete absence of [analysis on] how these changing dynamics may

alter the position of workers vis-à-vis their direct employers.' Indeed, there is little research on the large and growing Indian specialized garment sector, let alone the labour relations involved therein. This may owe to the late appearance of Indian firms on the international stage compared to other large emerging economies, a consequence of India's late industrialization (Chibber 2003) since the ascendance of branded apparel firms is highly dependent on the developmental process (Jin, Kandagal, and Jung 2013).

In Korea, there are about 20 firms that produce very large amounts for the most important global brands. The biggest is Sae-A, which has 17 large factories in Vietnam, Indonesia, China, Guatemala Nicaragua and Haiti, producing for Walmart, Gap, JC Penney, Kohl's, and several other big retailers. Another is YoungOne Group, with 28,000 workers in its factories in Bangladesh and about as many in Vietnam, producing for Nike, The North Face, Patagonia, and several other big brands. This diversified geographic sourcing is typical of the Korean and Taiwanese firms who shifted sourcing away from their native countries long ago because of high costs and in some cases politically motivated incentives.

The Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi production companies seem more attached to their native lands, possibly because of the size of the internal market into which they hope to expand and the large reserve army of labour available at low cost. They currently have no need of going offshore (although production in Southern China is now showing signs of production relocation because of rising labour costs), and have plenty of room to grow domestically.

From Cotton to Retail

South Asia's large capital holding garment manufacturers have spread across the region, exploiting uneven regional development. But while large firms have emerged in India and Sri Lanka, firms in Bangladesh and Pakistan remain comparatively small and limited. India's burgeoning consumer market and Sri Lanka's early entry into garment production explain the contrast in domestic firm maturation. In Sri Lanka, two firms are now preeminent: Mas Holdings and BrandX. Both are heavily invested internationally but Mas Holdings has a diverse portfolio, possessing factories in India and Bangladesh, real estate investments in the United Kingdom, holiday resorts and spices, joint ventures in major garment brands, and a finance section that operates out of the Maldives. Gokaldas, in India, has nearly 40 large factories in Karnataka. Shahi has over 56 large factories. Celebrity Fashions has expanded beyond India to Bangladesh, and has established sizeable domestic brands.

Clearly the global garment industry is in flux. The new world of 'fast-fashion', for instance, requires just-in-time production and minimal inventory, necessitating production-side upgrades that process retailer point-of-sale and logistics data, and create 'closer connections between the different stages of the production to retail chain' (Azmeah and Nadvi 2014, 708). Although the extraction of raw materials and textiles has a long history in the region, modern garment production did not begin in earnest until 1980s and '90s—and here the history of 'liberalised' industries elsewhere makes for an illuminating comparison.

In a Bair and Gereffi (2001) study of the blue jeans industry of Torreon, Mexico they find that the 1994 introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) gave rise to a similar phenomenon in apparel production. Low-value production firms, or *maquilas*, quickly ascended the commodity chain. NAFTA allowed buyers, primarily within the U.S., to circumvent MFA restrictions enabling an uninhibited flow of goods and capital between regional garment buyers and producers. Bair and Gereffi (2001, 1895) point out that in 1993, before NAFTA,

The only link on the Mexico side was assembly; by 1996, textile production as well as the post-assembly stage of laundering and finishing, one of the first production processes liberalized under NAFTA, were added. In 2000, the full range of production activities was taking place in Torreon. The other links of the chain that have been transferred to Torreon mean that more backward linkages and value are being added in the region beyond the assembly activities that were dominant prior to the emergence of full-package networks.

Bair and Gereffi (2001) note that upgrading in Torreon occurred with a small number of first-tier manufacturers possessing the capacities and capital needed to coordinate full-package networks. Having already acquired familiarity with U.S. retailers and brands through their experiences in *maquila* production these manufacturers were able to develop direct links with those same firms, eliminating the middlemen, and expand vertically, achieving higher profits than they ever had with *maquila* orders.

The rise of the *maquila* industry in Mexico, which witnessed a new dynamism with the addition of new jobs and blossoming export business, also saw the rapid consolidation of large garment manufacturers and the consequent closure of many small and medium-sized firms. As in Italy during

the 1970s and '80s, the Mexico of the 1990s and 2000s saw new networks in specialized garment manufacture lead to an economic upswing, and subsequent rise in real wages (Bair and Gereffi 2001).

Liberalisation in India came later. It wasn't until the 1990s that export-oriented garment production began to proliferate in India, and only towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s that large Indian garment firms began establishing beachheads in transnational markets. The constitutive forces of 'liberalisation'—increased access to foreign capital, greater domestic purchasing power, deregulated FDI, environment embeddedness—explain these changes. Gupta and Qiu (2013, 57) elaborate:

Market liberalization was the root of unleashing this trading potential, by empowering the Indian firms to participate in the global capital and investment markets. Many firms, such as Moser Baer in optical media, Bharat Forge in auto components, Reliance in polyester yarn, Arvind Mills in denim fabric, and Zee Telefilms in satellite television channels, become global category leaders.

Appelbaum (2008) describes the economic benefits of consolidation in China where globalization matured before India. He relates the history of manufacturer, Luen Thai Holdings, which created a 'supply-chain city' in Guangdong Province that includes a product-development centre, a 4,000-worker capacity on-site dormitory, and a two-million square foot factory. Luen Thai buyers (like Liz Claiborne, for example) soon became a one-stop-shop where designers meet directly with both factory and textile mill technicians, bringing the whole supply chain under one roof. Now Liz Claiborne plans to downsize its network of 250 suppliers in 35 countries to only a handful, including Luen Thai. Under this plan Liz Claiborne and Luen Thai anticipate

reducing staff by 40%, which will cut costs and improve turnaround times, through logistic harmonization (Appelbaum 2008).

An economy of scale geared toward producing primarily a single product is likely, for obvious reasons, to undercut more diversified competitors. In addition to Luen Thai, global suppliers like Panarub (Adidas' exclusive cleats producer in Indonesia), Yue Yuen (which does exclusive shoe production for Nike), and Indian denim and clothing conglomerate Arvind, provide examples in this paper of large capital holding companies that have upgraded to produce highly-efficient specialized product lines, and have thereby become crucial 'strategic partners' for major brands.

Evolving Workers' Strategies

The Asian garment firms given a boost by liberalisation were able to establish widely-dispersed supply chains without losing functional integration. They eliminated middlemen and inched ever closer to the source of their income, the customer. In the course of this ascension retailers acted as proxies, effecting a shift from a producer-driven marketplace to one that is consumer-led. Tewari (2006) explains India's flourishing clothing production, despite relatively low sectoral FDI, as a result of a burgeoning domestic market. Bangalore, where much of the Arvind's supply network is based, accounts for 30% of India's garment production (Mallikarjunappa 2011), and eight-hundred thousand of its 6 million garment workers (Mallikarjunappa 2011). Since the mid-1990s, the top 20 to 30 textile and apparel firms have begun introducing domestic brands, like

Parx (Raymond) and Indian Terrain (Celebrity Fashion Limited) (Jin, Kandagal, and Jung 2013).

Previously the divide between the source of value creation (production) and value capture (brands and retail) had forced workers to make demands of buyers, rather than their direct employers. This often had to be accomplished through Global North allies, like the Global Justice Movement's 'anti-sweatshop' campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s (Kreider 2000; Brooks 2007). Global North activists were asked to compel brands and retailers through secondary economic pressure or other tactics to take responsibility for the conditions in outsourced factories, since they had the power to impose labour standards on suppliers. This kind of response sought to close the growing gap between workers and the brand executives that controlled the industry, with a few rather isolated successes (Kumar and Mahoney 2014).

The asymmetry of power between buyer and supplier exists also at the point of consumption. The exploitation of uneven development leads to clothing produced by brown hands adorning white bodies. As Merk (2008, 82) states, 'manufacturers produce shoes that are distributed and sold under the name of the contractor [i.e. the brand] and little control is exercised over (retail) market outlets in Western countries. Generally speaking, their lack of control over large market outlets renders them dependent.' These socio-economic factors caused campaigns at the point of consumption to become an important lever against brands to achieve gains for workers at the point of production (Kreider 2000; Kumar and Mahoney 2014; Brooks 2007).

Conventional export-oriented units in the garment sector undermine worker campaigns to organize through systematic harassment and retaliatory dismissals. If the union is established, however, the company is likely to be driven from the market as transnational brands take their orders elsewhere. The early campaigns to unionize in the 1980s and 1990s therefore had predictable results. As described by Kumar (2014), the strategy of Bangalore-based Garment And Textile Workers' Union (GATWU), the largest independent garment union in India, have taken form within this context. In its first years, GATWU was involved with community organizing, establishing a women workers' front. Shortly after, GATWU began to incorporate a brand strategy, targeting large global brands with the assistance of allies at the point of consumption. Under pressure during the struggle at the Arvind Warehouse in Ramnagara, GATWU evolved practices targeting full package suppliers while simultaneously placing secondary pressure on brands.

A Struggle at a Warehouse:

History

Originally called Arvind Mills, Indian clothing manufacturer and distributor Arvind Limited is the flagship company of the Lalbhai Group. Arvind owns the textile mills, garment factories, distribution and retail outlets of cotton shirts, knits, khakis, and denim for major transnational brands of PVH Corporation (which include Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, IZOD, and Arrow), as well as Gap and others across South Asia and the Middle-East. Arvind is the largest

manufacturer of denim in India and amongst the top three manufacturers and distributors of denim in the world (*Reuters 2007; Singh 2012*)⁹⁷.

Established in 1931, Arvind, along with thousands of other producers, was borne out of the demand for domestically produced fabric, part of Mahatma Gandhi's call for boycott of imported fabric, or the 'Swadeshi Movement'. In 1986, Arvind began investing in increasing its production capacity and erected its first denim facility with a capacity of 10 million meters per annum. By 1987, under Arvind's 'renovision' strategy, it attempted to counter state policies that advantaged smaller powerlooms and resulted in the closure of several larger composite mills by expanding its products marketed as 'high-quality premium niche' to the international market, chiefly to the U.S. Small-scale power looms simply could not compete with the large scale, high quality, timely turnaround expected by U.S. buyers. As Sampler and Sarkar (2010, 74) state, these requirements "meant that manufacturers would have to invest in capital-intensive technology, large scale as well as better management of operations." In 1987 Arvind launched denim in India, the first time any mill in the country produced the material (Choudhury 2001). Before this point all denim sold in India was through well known foreign imported brands like Levis or local Indian brands like Wings, which imported its denim. At the time Arvind was a well-known textile mill with trusted distribution channels throughout India. Before denim, its production had been largely limited to high quality mainstays traditional Indian clothing such as voiles, dhotis, and sarees.

⁹⁷ It is widely acknowledged that Arvind is amongst the top three denim manufacturers in the world, while some claiming it is the world's largest (Reporter 2010; Ross et al. 2001)

Arvind incorporated a dual distribution system creating its own separate distribution channels of what became known as Arvind's Original Denim, a brand in itself. This cut out the middleman between manufacturer and producer, representing Arvind's first step beyond textile mills. Arvind's success in India quickly expanded outward and it soon began selling its material to leading transnational brands of denim such as Levis, Wrangler, and Lee. Technological upgrading and increased capacity made Arvind an important partner to transnational brands and by 1990 it had opened up offices in New York, Hong Kong, and London (Choudhury 2001).

Thus Arvind became a key initiator and beneficiary of India's 'denim revolution' of the 1980s. Jeans were inextricably linked to the aesthetic of the young urban Indian and with each successive year, with more expendable cash in the pockets of India's urban residents, the increased affordability of jeans saw an ever-expanding consumer base. By 1991 the company was selling 100 million meters of denim per year and within a year they had upgraded a number of plants further increasing production and cost cutting. By the mid-1990s Arvind had expanded across the supply chain with separate textile, garment and telecom divisions to create harmonized supply chains that provided global brands with greater comparative economies of scale, increasing Arvind's capacity and value-capture.

Around the same time in 1990s Arvind expanded the consumer base of jeans outside of the urban centres to the villages, by creating an in-house low-cost brand RufNTuf. Arvind combated rural scepticism of readymade clothing by creating low-cost bare bones pre-cut 'ready-to-stitch' jeans, in effect,

transferring part of the labour process to the consumer. This functions as an 'extra-market' mechanism to lower labour costs by relying on the unwaged work undertaken predominantly by women in the home. The strategy led to a second explosion of jeans, and Arvind sold over a million pieces within the first two months (Shah 2000). This massive expansion of Arvind's denim capacity was funded largely by domestic financiers and overseas financial institutions, the latter made easier in post-reform India (D'silva and Joseph 2014). Simultaneously, Arvind began using capital generated from denim sales to diversify its production portfolio, bolstering its non-denim technological upgrading by breaking ground on India's largest state-of-the-art shirting, gabardine and knits facility. However by the late-1990s a shift in fashion trends to gabardine and corduroy led to a crash in denim prices and Arvind had to restructure its debts in order to repay its increasingly onerous international debts. By 2001, Arvind had the "distinction of becoming the first Indian corporation to restructure its entire debt in a single go" (D'silva and Joseph 2014, 46).

By the early 2000s Arvind had "moved on from being a commodity player to a value provider from South Asia and even launched its own brands in the process" (Sampler and Sarkar 2010, 68). Arvind was initially hit hard by falling input prices and revenues brought on by the phase-out of the MFA in 2005 when China offloaded nearly 40% of the world's denim, severely undercutting global denim prices and Arvind's competitive advantage. However, within India the MFA had the opposite effect on Arvind's market

share, as already hard-pressed powerloom or handloom weavers were now additionally saddled with the cost of meeting India's Central Value-Added Tax.

These smaller member-controlled handloom cooperatives had been encouraged through macroeconomic policy of the post-independence Nehruvian state and were now collapsing under the weight of both international and domestic competitive pressures. As small capitals began to quickly vanish larger capitals like Arvind would take over, realizing exponential growth in their market share. Indeed, India would become a prime beneficiary of the Post-MFA world, with India rising to become one of the world's foremost cotton producers with a global market share of 25%.

Today, Arvind is a conglomerate of seven diversified divisions: Lifestyle Apparel, Lifestyle Fabrics, Brands, Retailscape, Engineering, Telecom and Advanced Material, with their own brands including Flying Machine (jeans), RufNTuf (jeans), Newport (jeans), and Excalibur (shirts). The expansion in Arvind's retail division is a crucial component in understanding its comparative advantage and its appeal to transnational clothing capital. Crucially, in 2007 Arvind magnified its brand and retail division with the creation of MegaMart in addition to Club America. Almost 45% of Arvind's retail sales are its own brands while the remainder are international brands. Arvind's strategy today is to provide transnational brands and large retailers with the full production package, from cotton field to retail rack, providing valuable access to India's retail market as well as product design functions, expanding its role across the supply chain. Arvind expanded its services to include low-cost product design for transnational brands by hiring a team of international fashion designers,

which is the clearest indication of Arvind's extension to the high value phases in the supply chain. A sign of Arvind's growing value to buyers is in its ability to negotiate stability of orders by requiring buyers to enter long-term purchasing contracts (Sampler and Sarkar 2010), lowering Arvind's liability in a inherently volatile fashion sector and aggregating its competitive market advantages.

Arvind is the sole survivor among over 85 textile mills that made their home in Ahmedabad three decades ago. The singular reason is Arvind's decision to transform from a multi-product company to primarily a denim manufacturer (Sampler and Sarkar 2010). Denim production is highly specialized and more capital-intensive, while the basic material, namely cotton, remains unchanged. Arvind has increased its market share by integrating various phases of the value chain, thus keeping its costs low, and investing heavily in Research and Development (R&D). Arvind spends 5% of its annual turnover on R&D, leading to technological advances in the sector with innovations like modified airjet looms as well as slasher technology in dyeing operations making Arvind's 'vertically integrated plant[s] among the most modern in the world' (Sampler and Sarkar 2010, 70). Arvind's technological advances have contributed to economic upgrading and a 50% reduction in its manufacturing costs over time (Shukla 1998), allowing it to expand even more rapidly, further cornering the denim market and becoming an indispensable partner to transnational brands. This represents a departure from the low R&D investment that has become a trademark for Indian companies (Bound and Thornton 2012).

Of the 400 denim manufacturers worldwide, around 40 manufacturers account for less than 30% of the world output, whereas the largest retailers share more than 30% of the markets amongst themselves (Sampler and Sarkar 2010). This incongruity shows that 'buyers' are still more powerful within the denim commodity chain; however output is not the only variable involved. Arvind's market power is linked not to its production capacity alone, but rather to its integrated value chain and access to the Indian consumer market, which provides substantial economies of scale, cost cutting as well as shorter cycle and turnaround times for buyers. The company's primary stated goal shows where it sees its key advantage as a full package supplier, 'With its presence across the textile value chain, the company endeavours to be a one-stop shop for leading garment brands and with this intent.' (Arvind 2014).

By 2011, Arvind began its transition to become a *transnational* full package supplier. Importantly, Arvind announced it would set up a large-scale garment factory in Bangladesh (Ahmed and Nathan 2014). Additionally it secured long-term production, marketing, and retail packaged licensing contracts with major transnational brands across South Asia and the Middle East for PVH brands such as IZOD in 2011 (PVH 2011) and a 50:50 joint venture to open 500 stores with Tommy Hilfiger in 2012 (Bailay 2013). Then, in 2013, Arvind entered international undergarment retail by becoming the exclusive licensee for major undergarment markets and becoming licensed to sell Hanes in India.

In 2014, Arvind announced a mega-e-commerce initiative, 'Creyate', to be included in its supplier packaging. In the same year the company announced

that it would enter a full package agreements with the largest casual wear retailer in the U.S., Gap, expanding from production to distribution, marketing, managing Gap's Indian e-commerce on its newly announced platform, in order to open 40 stores for Gap beginning in 2015. For Gap's South Asian debut it chose to franchise with Arvind, with whom it had a long-standing relationship for denim manufacture, despite 100% FDI being permitted in India for single brand retailers.

Today, Arvind offers 'full packages' all under one roof, having integrated most of the clothing commodity chain including textiles manufacture, garment production, marketing, design, with a vast network of ever-expanding retail outlets, as well as GPS-based fleet automation and management for logistics and in-house warehousing facilities. Over the past decade, Arvind has seen year-on-year growth rates, doubling its annual revenue between 2004 and 2010 and doubling it again between 2010 and the end of 2014, with annual profits increasing by 26% in 2011 and by 30% in 2014 alone. Thus, Arvind's continual expansion geographically and across the value chain has increased its economy of scale and bargaining power in the clothing commodity chain to secure longer-term full package contracts, including the full breadth of clothing manufacture off the success of its denim sector, further guaranteeing its increasing power vis-à-vis buyers.

Arvind Distribution Site Workers' Struggle

One of Arvind's primary distribution sites was at a warehouse an hour's drive southwest of Bangalore in the town of Ramnagara. While the Ramnagara warehouse is owned by Arvind, the building itself is leased for another 20 years,

according to one manager, who claims that Arvind actually owns one of the three floors. In 2011, the Ramnagara warehouse handled cataloguing, inventory, and international distribution in South Asia and in the Middle East, primarily for transnational brands owned by PVH.

For example, major brands that circulated through the Ramnagara warehouse included US Polo, Gant, and PVH brands Tommy Hilfiger, Arrow and IZOD. Arrow had already signed a long-term full package contract with Arvind, as the first to bring it to the country in 1993. In 2011 Arvind signed an eight-year full package licensing contract, alongside a renewal option that would extend that agreement until 2029, with Arvind to produce, market, and retail IZOD throughout India, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, Madagascar, Seychelles, Oman, Yemen, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives (PVH 2011). At the time, the major distribution node between the point of production and consumption was the distribution site in Ramnagara.

Within the Ramnagara warehouse Arvind had created a contract company, one owned by an Arvind HR Manager named Harsha. Harsha was technically the employer of the warehouse workforce of 150 fulltime workers. Despite the India Contract Labour Act of 1970 which states that contract employees can only be tasked with 'non-core' activities, the practice of company's establishing shell contract companies is endemic. The workers were predominantly from Ramnagara, around 50 were women, and a majority were low caste *dalits* or categorized as Other Backward Classes.

Before the beginning of the workers' unrest at the end of 2010, the site was a 'pressing warehouse', which meant it had five areas of responsibility: ironing, fabric testing, fabric distribution, accessories distribution, and alterations.

Warehouse worker Jayram⁹⁸ recounts the primary tasks,

Garments arrived inward and were categorized by size and style into inventory, placed on racks and coded. The outward department received directions electronically from the head office specifying which garments, how many pieces, what sizes, and to which country. The system operator then gives the directions to helpers, who direct the pickers. Next the helpers bring clothes to a scanner while another registers the code and where the clothes will be delivered. Workers place the box of clothes for the dispatcher to ensure it is picked up and ready to be taken to its destination.

During the seasonal rush the numbers of interstate workers at the warehouse would swell with short-term 'job workers' brought in mostly from north India. As another worker, Ratnamma⁹⁹, explained, 'a 'job worker' is like a *coolie* (a worker for hire). They are brought in to work for the day and do not get any social benefits like healthcare or pensions and are paid by piece-rate rather than a salary, paid weekly rather than monthly, but their lodging and food are paid for by the factory.' Job workers end up costing the factory more in the short-term but flexible terms are essential within the seasonal garment sector and, as we will see in the case of Arvind, a crucial bulwark against worker organizing.

In November 2010, the General Manager (GM) of the warehouse called all the workers to the floor and announced that Arvind had decided to close the warehouse down and shift work to a new warehouse in Hosakote. In the past

⁹⁸ Interview, October 11th, 2014

⁹⁹ Interview, February 5th, 2013

five years Arvind has built a number of new warehouses in and around Bangalore to facilitate its growth including in Whitefield, Hosakote, and Chintamani. The reason given to workers for the move was that the building had been leaking during the rainy season and would be prohibitively expensive to repair. The General Manager told the workers they could get employment in the new locations, but nearly all decided to stay in Ramnagara. A few asked that the company provide a bus to Hosakote but the GM refused, offering two to three months salary as a severance package for those who declined.

Arvind worker Santosh¹⁰⁰ recalls, ‘none of us said anything after this announcement, we began discussing amongst ourselves, and one of the workers Nirmala had previously worked at an Arvind garment factory in Peenya Industrial Area in Bangalore which had a union fight a few years back. Nirmala tracked down the union contact from her sister who still worked there and that’s how we joined the union.’ Upon arriving, GATWU organizers asked how far the workers were willing to go, as Kempraju¹⁰¹ recalls, ‘we told [GATWU organizers] that we were willing to lay our bodies in front of the gates to stop the closure.’ Within days, 70% of the workforce, 111 of the 150 workers, had joined the union. By December 2010 the workers were given some critical information, as Nirmala¹⁰² recounts, ‘A driver at the Arvind transport company SpeedX once worked in the warehouse and still had friends there. One of the workers at the warehouse received a call from the transport worker stating that he had heard Arvind had called a large number of trucks to Ramnagara. So we

¹⁰⁰ Interview, October 12th, 2014

¹⁰¹ Interview, December 14th, 2013

¹⁰² Interview, February 6th, 2013

were ready.’ The workers had strong suspicions that Arvind planned to move the equipment that night.

Another worker, Krishna¹⁰³, recalls, ‘we waited in a nearby forested area and at nine-thirty we observed that one truck went in the gates and the warehouse lights went on. We immediately called all the workers and union officials.’ By 10pm there were one hundred local workers assembled outside of the factory gates alongside members from Suwarna, a popular Kannada-language news channel. The workers began picketing and laid down their bodies in front of the gates refusing to let mover trucks leave the premises. The Arvind warehouse sits on the main artery that runs through Ramnagara and so word quickly spread. Local community organizations began rallying their own members and the crowd began to grow. Within a few hours dozens of police arrived at the behest of the management. The crowd continued to swell and hundreds of community members, workers and their family put their bodies on the ground, picketed, and chanted. Finally, as Jayram¹⁰⁴ recounted, ‘in the early morning the GM finally stepped out of the gates and announced that they would not close down the factory and the crowd erupted with celebration.’

On January of 2012, after a year of union education and membership strengthening, GATWU submitted a Charter of Demands, which would have resulted in union recognition and collective bargaining at Arvind. The threshold for filing a Charter of Demands is 10% of the workforce, and in the middle of 2012 the union density at Arvind had reached an unparalleled 70%.

¹⁰³ *Interview*, February 6th, 2013

¹⁰⁴ *Interview*, October 11th, 2014

For most of 2012 the union would be attacked and its membership undermined. Kempraju¹⁰⁵, another union leader at the warehouse, indicated how the warehouse management began exerting pressure on the union, ‘once our union became bigger and began to make our presence known, the management first offered some leaders money and promotions to switch allegiances, then this turned to threats; then they began to bring in contract workers mostly from [the north-eastern state of] Assam, and finally they began to physically attack us.’

By November 2012, the systemic abuse at Arvind had reached a fever pitch. That month a number of union-side workers were targeted for violence by management-side workers at the direction of the HR managers. Following these actions by the management, four union leaders were terminated from employment. An international campaign was initiated, primarily by the International Union League for Brand Responsibility, of which GATWU is a member-union, with allies placing pressure on brands and workers targeting Arvind retailers for pickets and actions in Bangalore and Mysore. After a month-long campaign and an investigation by an outside labour-rights monitoring group, the workers were rehired with back pay.

What came to light over the course of the union campaign, and would later be confirmed in a district labour court decision, was that the Arvind was operating illegally without a contract license and had not paid workers legally-mandated overtime. The management also began laying the groundwork to convert the warehouse from a ‘pressing warehouse’ to a ‘returns warehouse’ in

¹⁰⁵ *Interview*, December 14th, 2013

response to GATWU submitting the Charter of Demands. A pressing warehouse is a primary node between in-house production and dis-integrated international consumption, with clothes arriving directly from Arvind's manufacturing facilities and distributed directly to brand-name retailers. A 'returns warehouse' functions primarily as a site for handling rejected garments, repackaging clothes originally destined for the international market into garments for domestic consumption.

By early 2013 Arvind began the 'returns warehouse' transformation with the Ramnagara's pressing functions being moved to a new facility in Chintamani on the eastern part of Karnataka. Within a few months, the facility had become a 'returns warehouse'. A worker, Jayram¹⁰⁶, described the return warehouse tasks;

If someone returns a shirt produced at an Arvind production facility those outside retailers within India send it back to Arvind, that shirt comes to our warehouse and we wash it, iron it, and repackage it with a new poli-cover. It's then delivered to Arvind's own discount retailer, such as MegaMart, and is sold usually at a 50% discount or 'buy 1 get 1 for free' deal. Sometimes older clothes that don't sell are also repackaged at the returns warehouse.

Santosh¹⁰⁷ believed this transformation of the warehouse was directly linked to workers' actions, 'it's clear why [Arvind management] did this, they know that our union is strong and if we went on strike it would cost the company greatly as a pressing warehouse, but as a returns warehouse the impact would be almost nothing because those items are non-essential and not headed for international retailers.'

¹⁰⁶ Interview, October 11th, 2014

¹⁰⁷ Interview, September 29th, 2014

Other workers had similar suspicions suggesting that one-day of a strike alone at the pressing warehouse during the season would cost the company immensely, but as a returns warehouses the impact would be negligible. As of November 2014, the union had 80 members, rising from its nadir of 25 at the end of 2013. Even though the number of workers has remained consistently at 150 and the workload had remained stable throughout, Arvind has begun replacing local Ramnagara workers with 'job workers' brought in from Goa, Assam, and Orissa, which are now at 50 workers, up from 20 in 2010. In early 2014 after reading a company press release on the Internet, Arvind warehouse union members began demanding a 20% increase in their wages, citing Arvind's profits and the announcement of the opening of 500 new stores.

Mangala¹⁰⁸ stated, 'when we approached management they opened up a file and showed us that although they made profits, those were redirected towards opening more retail shops.' Despite company's denials of profit numbers, union members continued to exert pressure on the company to increase workers' wages. As Rajanna¹⁰⁹ from Arvind stated, 'Smaller garment companies I have worked at have never had profits that we can demand higher wages from, in fact they usually use their lack of profits to make us work more and for less, and even when they do have profits they are rarely announced or easily available like at Arvind... even if they try and lie to us and say they are barely surviving.' Jayram¹¹⁰ stated that workers have begun looking into other

¹⁰⁸ Interview, November 13th, 2014

¹⁰⁹ Interview, October 15th, 2014

¹¹⁰ Interview, October 11th, 2014

ways to pressure the company, ‘we are now reaching out to Arvind production facilities near Ramnagara in Kengari and textile as well.’

Arvind brings in ‘job workers’ despite having to pay for workers’ individual lodging, transport and three meals a day. As Krishna¹¹¹ states,

[Arvind] are so afraid of the union that they don’t want to hire any local workers and because the ‘job workers’ are being kept under constant supervision at transportation, housing and meals, it becomes both difficult to access them and they’re also much more fearful. It is much more difficult to organize in a different land when you don’t speak the language, do not have a community, and owe your food, bed, and transport to the company.

Jayram¹¹² adds, ‘they withhold some of the salary that was earned by ‘job workers’ until the end, so the company can ask anything of them and they have to do it since they are terrified that they’ll lose that money.’

Yet, despite its shortcomings, the campaign at Arvind had a number of successes including Arvind agreeing to pay overtime and, as Pratibha¹¹³ from GATWU stated, ‘Arvind responded immediately to the Karnataka state minimum wage increase in 2014, unlike all other major companies, and we believe that is because of the campaign in Ramnagara.’ Another victory is that the union gained in its direct power vis-à-vis management. Jayram¹¹⁴ stated,

The campaign against the union proved to all the workers, even formerly management-side workers, that management will use any methods to make more money and they’ll offer management positions to workers but never follow through. They physically assaulted us, brought in the police, and dismissed us, which has only emboldened workers’ resolve. We’ve come out stronger because of Arvind’s campaign against us.

¹¹¹ Interview, December 4th, 2014

¹¹² Interview, February 6th, 2013

¹¹³ Interview, October 15th, 2014

¹¹⁴ Interview, October 11th, 2014

Towards a Buyer-Producer Symbiosis

Arvind cemented the vertical and horizontal organizational benefits of sectorally specialized geographic clusters found in Italy, Mexico, and South America in previous decades. The firm mirrored the vertical integration industrial clusters in terms of capacity exchange and production transfer, by absorbing the industrial geography and growing upstream in the supply chain. Arvind grew from a cotton mill to become one of the largest retailers in India. Yet, many of Bangalore's large producing apparel production companies have yet to witness the kind of vertical integration found in Arvind, such as Bombay Reyon, which failed to upgrade and has now nearly shuttered their doors completely, a victim of Gereffi's 'buyer-driven' dilemma. However, in specialized garment production like shoes or denim, there is a greater capacity for technological and economic upgrading. Furthermore, there is an enhanced ability to overpower any potential competitors, and, over time, to achieve a vertical expansion across the value chain.

By acquiring smaller firms and absorbing them into the full package network, Arvind expanded to more value-added activities of product development, branding, marketing, and retail. Through vertical integration and technological upgrading, firms like Arvind are able to increase their proportion of profits while value is added throughout the production process. These changes simultaneously reduce the cost of production while increasing capacity. The specialization of the production and growth of a domestic market permitted sufficient capital accumulation for organizational and technological expansion, allowing Arvind and other large companies to erect insurmountable

barriers to entry for smaller capitals, resulting in aggregated profits for firms that had survived. The capacity of these firms to move upstream in more value-added links in the global clothing commodity chain further cemented their market power. Gereffi (2002) states that much of the power of global 'buyers' is in their ability to 'act as strategic brokers in linking overseas factories and traders'; yet what we see from companies like Arvind is the fusing of consumption and production under one roof, weakening the strategic power of these traditional 'brokers'.

While acknowledging that a distribution site is different from a production site, the Arvind distribution site in Ramnagara allows us to examine the first stages of this shifting dynamic between producers and buyers, workers and their employers. One of the clearest examples of this change is the signing of long-term exclusive licensing contracts between major brands and Arvind, which apply across South Asia and the Middle East. A number of PVH-owned clothing brands that were distributed through the Ramnagara site had signed long-term contracts shortly before or during the labour unrest at the Ramnagara. Such long-term agreements had been pushed by Arvind and portend a departure from short-term purchasing orders, which are still a hallmark of assembly-only suppliers. The weakness of assembly-only suppliers is their dependence on buyers, but long-term contracts have the effect of 'locking-in' retailers and brands to large firms like Arvind.

Arvind's growth out of textiles towards specialized garment production with relatively high capital-intensity meant that it began at a fundamentally higher valued phase than assembly-only production. It is not cost-effective to

ship natural fibres in raw form, which gives textile industries in supplier countries an built-in advantage. The specifications of international buyers for these specialized products advantaged large-scale indigenous producers by intensifying supplier-end technological upgrading, organizational agglomeration, and supply chain integration. The strategy at Arvind is to focus on delivery to five or six large-scale customers in order to align delivery capacity to their sourcing calendar and ease uncertainty of demand. By providing end-to-end 'full package' services for a few large-scale brands, Arvind became an irreplaceable partner to key players in the international clothing market. The resulting production networks are a durable system of social capital that is a precious competitive asset for global buyers.

As shown throughout, economies of scale brought on by upgrading and social downgrading undercuts competitors, allowing the firm to expand into the various phases in the production process, leading to the emergence of full packages, which bring down the costs of production for buyers. This results in higher volume orders for Arvind and, a greater competitive disadvantage for competitors, resulting in more downsizing and closures for competitors and an accelerated rate of expansion horizontally for Arvind. Finally, this results in a combined force of a greater value capture at the supplier end of the commodity chain and fewer competitive options for buyers. In essence, Gap needs Arvind almost as much as Arvind needs Gap, a reality that will be further cemented if current trends continue.

Part of the 'full package' includes Arvind's retail chains that run across the country selling international brands as well as its own. Arvind and other

such firms operate as gatekeepers to these emerging consumer markets, guaranteeing an immense shift in power vis-a-vis buyers. An example is the case of U.S. retailer Gap. Gap actively sought out the Indian market after heavy losses in the U.S. Expansion into the subcontinent became essential for Gap as a strategy to absorb and turn the tide on its own crisis of profitability. Despite the Indian government allowing a 100% FDI since 2012, Gap chose to join with their long-time manufacturing partner Arvind to become a vital partner in its entry into India's burgeoning consumer market, both online and offline. But retail reaches beyond India for Arvind with licensing and manufacturing for PVH across Asia and the Middle East, as well as being an official retailer of PVH in India. Thus you can classify some large capital holding garment suppliers in India, who were once comprador in nature, as now in the league of global multinational capital.

Most evidently the shifting dynamic between buyer and producer is found by those involved in the struggle in Ramnagara itself. It became clear early on to those involved that the Arvind case revealed prescient clues to other cases that would open shortly after. Pratibha¹¹⁵, organizer at GATWU, states while reflecting on the campaign, 'We did everything right. We put pressure on the brands, like PVH, we got an investigator in, we had a sympathetic brand representative, but the company was still able to reorganize the task of the warehouse to diminish our power without diminishing their standing with brands.'

¹¹⁵ Interview, November 2nd, 2014

As the investigator from an independent labour organization that inspected the Ramnagara firings in 2012 stated¹¹⁶, 'It is clear that an established 'brand pressure' campaign simply wouldn't work here', adding, 'with companies like Arvind, from our experience, brands just don't have as much leverage anymore because Arvind now effectively controls all of PVH's production and sales in the entire region. Brands have the perfect excuse for not doing anything now despite consumer pressure.' During the Arvind investigation it became clear that PVH was not in an optimum position to negotiate with Arvind, and as the independent monitor later indicated, 'PVH cannot lose Arvind's business, since the kind of services that Arvind offers are only replaceable at a heavy financial cost to PVH.'

Specialization is not the only variable in buyer-producer symbiosis but represents a key path towards monopoly power. For example, Shahi Exports is one of the largest export-oriented garment manufacturers in India; however they are not specialized. Shahi produces a large proportion of clothes for H&M, Gap, and other major brands in its 56 factories in India alone, yet have repeatedly violated basic labour rights in the face of frequent warnings from international monitoring organizations. As one investigator at a prominent monitoring organization told me, 'Shahi knows we have been monitoring them since 2002, but they continue to openly violate basic workers' rights. H&M has been made known of Shahi's violations and have gone completely silent. It's because H&M knows that it will be too expensive to find another producer the size of Shahi. Shahi knows this and that's why they don't care'.

¹¹⁶ Interview, October 19th, 2014

A New Space for Workers' Power?

Many workers at Arvind maintain that the management was desperate to close the warehouse due to the union, but a combination of factors prevented them from doing so. This included: the long-term lease, the trade union campaign, potential legal violations, a possible international backlash, and, most importantly, the ability for Arvind to internally reorganize and transform a inward-outward pressing warehouse for international buyers into a returns warehouse where goods are delivered to domestic in-house retailers. Thus potential liability and power of workers as a strategic 'chokepoint' in the supply chain are diminished since the efficacy of a strike as an economic lever is significantly reduced¹¹⁷.

Unlike domestic capital of South Asia of the past Arvind is flexible, restructuring domestic and international functions to reduce risk. This *dual labour markets* strategy applies at multiple levels. Firstly, Arvind provides its 'core' employees, such as managers, designers or others at high-value phases, with a wide breadth of employee benefits whereas 'peripheral' workers, those employed through shell contractor companies at the low-value phases of production, remain subcontracted, heavily exploited, with few avenues for redress. Secondly, Arvind's phases of production for international brands are

¹¹⁷ It has been argued that the battle against capital has now shifted away from struggles at the point of production to sabotage of the 'technical infrastructure of the metropolis', in other words, to circulation, distribution, transport and consumption (CITE: *Coming Insurrection*). But as we will see in the case of Arvind warehouse, although it represents an interface between production and consumption, unlike the immovable power of a port, a critical 'chokepoint' in the supply chain, a large shed in a dusty little town can be easily replaced or reorganized.

in-house while its production for domestic retail and of its own brands are outsourced. Similar to transnational brands delinking production and retail averts production costs of the price of reproduction (i.e. social security, pensions, etc) and reduces risk brought on by the instability of seasonality and fluctuating consumption patterns. Finally, as was accomplished during the struggle at the Arvind in-house warehouse in Ramnagara, a pressing warehouse was converted into a returns warehouse externalizing its labour from 'core' to 'non-core' functions. This insulates Arvind from potential pressure by major brands who might otherwise be compelled to place pressure on Arvind over labour violations, averting potential losses caused by work stoppages or strikes at a major artery in its distribution network. Thus, the flexibility of dual labour markets allow Arvind multiple methods by which to intensify downward pressure on subcontracted workers, reduce liability by cleaving production from consumption, while minimizing the efficacy of workplace actions.

What the case of growing supplier-end firms like Arvind shows is that large capital holding companies are able to expend more capital to bring on expensive 'job workers' and have a growing number of alternative facilities to undermine workers' actions at a single warehouse. Arvind was able to invest in a number of substitute warehouses across the state and replace the work at Ramnagara. This capacity would be inconceivable a few decades ago or with smaller capital holding firms. The workers' struggle at the Arvind warehouse represents a classic example in which greater market power and value capture for Arvind translates into a greater ability for capital to overwhelm and undermine labour at a specific facility. Arvind having numerous facilities

spread around the same area, especially in garments, easily turns the production process around from one facility to another, whether it is a full grown production facility or a warehouse. Workers claim that they would not be surprised if in a few years Arvind slowly downsizes the return warehouse or completely removes it, because all they would be losing was a shed which they did not even own.

Nonetheless, despite reorganization and losing members, the trade union at the Ramnagara warehouse remains strong, although within a large company not weakened by threats of being shutdown due to loss of brands contracts. A budding 'full package' capitalist environment also results in greater negotiating power for the workers of Arvind. As workers at Arvind indicated, company profits and high-profile deals can be used to bolster demands for a greater share of the value for workers. Information that may have previously difficult to find is now accessible to workers because of Arvind growing and high-profile status, and this has been utilized by workers against their direct employers. Arvind's sizeable value capture was used by members to augment demands and strengthen the union by sharpening the antagonism between workers and bosses.

Alongside Arvind's growth across the supply chain, workers create their own mirrored 'labour networks' of Arvind and affiliated workers. For example, workers received information on Arvind's plans from a worker who had retained a contact at his old job within the Arvind logistics network. This information was critical in preventing the relocation. Additionally, Arvind workers in the Ramnagara warehouse are attempting to expand the

membership of the union to include nearby Arvind textile and garment facilities to unify demands against a single employer.

Finally, the targeting of retail shops has assisted an expansion in the labour network to include allied activists, urban unions, and potentially Arvind retail workers. The Arvind campaigns highlight a growth in the purchasing power in the Global South, the resulting boom in retail, and a shift in the power of workers to confront their employer at the point of sale. By targeting retail shops in Mysore and Bangalore both at Arvind-owned shops and major brand customers of Arvind during the campaign at Ramnagara, workers were able to attack both point of production and point of consumption to put pressure on their direct employers. This bridging between spaces of production and consumption is benefiting producers, changing the relationship between global buyers and, now, *global* producers through a burgeoning retail market. But clearly this is also helping change the relationship between workers and their bosses by adding multiple points of attack. The growth of consumer power in the Global South is a relatively new phenomenon and will fundamentally change the ways in which anti-sweatshop resistance takes shape.

Arvind's growing client list also means a greater ability to survive the loss of a single contract even from a large branded company. The relationship between buyer and supplier continues to be asymmetrical in favour of buyers, but companies like Arvind are no longer entirely dependent on a single global brand. Arvind can increasingly withstand the loss of a single major client. Whereas with smaller assembly-only, single-factory suppliers, a single brand can become the ultimate decision-maker, and the breaking of a large

purchasing contract has often resulted in the closure of the factory. Moreover, large firms like Arvind hold enough capital of their own to withstand the loss of a single contract. It is true that emergent firms like Arvind do not have surplus capital in the form of finance capital, rather capital that is accumulated is immediately invested. Yet, the liquidity and leveraging of assets affords large suppliers a degree of freedom not accessible to assembly-only suppliers.

These changing dynamics have informed GATWUs strategies. From its foundation in 2005, GATWUs strategy has gone from a reactive 'hot shop' form, followed by community organizing strategy; and in 2012 it began to target brands' outsourced production by affiliating with the International Union League for Brand Responsibility. Following the struggle at Arvind, GATWU added another layer to its strategy once more to account for the changing nature of supplier-end capital. The symbiosis of buyer and supplier meant that workers could now leverage a greater amount of power against full package suppliers across the supply chain buttressed by a corporate campaign for traditional western brands. As Jayram¹¹⁸ from GATWU stated,

Three years ago our strategy was organizing community through our women's organization and convert community members into factory-level committees, from there we propped our union up. After that we moved towards targeting a single brand, organizing the outsourced company, and getting our allies in the west to put consumer pressure through brand campaigns....as we see in Ramnagara, the land itself is the value because they don't have valuable machinery there, making labour organizing at a single facility a recipe for failure....Its not like ten years ago, now even if we get a brand to tell a manufacturer to remediate a situation the manufacturer will refuse. I was in a meeting where it happened just like that. Now, we're starting to look at a strategy of organizing companies like Shahi or Arvind. With such large companies present

¹¹⁸ Interview, October 20th, 2014

in the sector you can no longer organize around a single factory or rely only on Western allies and expect it would sustain itself.

CONCLUSION

The Arvind case is part of a larger phenomenon. The power dynamic in the global garment industry is shifting from the unilateral power of brands to a more mutually dependent relationship between global brands and big multinational production companies, with the original Taiwanese, Korean, Hong Kong and Singaporean companies now being joined by Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi and Mainland Chinese companies. There are of course significant differences between how these different capitals function. The case of Arvind demonstrates how one type of big production company developed into a power unto itself, is able to deal with the brands as not quite an equal, but as a 'strategic partner' whose vital interests have to be respected. Ongoing struggles at companies such as the Azim Group in Bangladesh, where the owner is a politically connected and a powerful member of the national elite, is able to use violence with impunity against trade unionists, and stand up to transnational brands despite a number of brands cutting their relationship with the company, indicates a growing power of garment firms across the subcontinent.

In addition to utilizing the power of the state throughout its history, capitalism and its architects have successfully constructed technological, organizational, and spatial fixes to counter crises of profitability. That is to say, capital has automated, reorganized, or relocated capital to increase its

productivity and surplus value. Indeed, technological upgrading at Arvind has the potential to undermine the power of workers in the factory. The full package supplier may even take the place of the multinationals they once served, emulating their structure to undermine workers' power. What is certain is that full package suppliers are reconfiguring some of the fundamental mechanics of the global garment sector. Significantly, entry into retailing is more onerous than entry into manufacturing or trading in textiles. For the first time the gatekeepers to burgeoning consumer markets are the very manufacturers of the products themselves.

As global brands continue to outsource more of the production process, companies like Arvind continue to insource and expand into the export-oriented value chain. Arvind's one-stop shop offers global buyers cost-effective procurement of raw materials and shorter lead, inventory and transport times, and other cost benefits tied to an integrated supply chain. Despite buyers outsourcing to reduce their international production footprint, the signing of long-term full package agreements has the effect of locking-in brand name companies with higher-value suppliers and reconfiguring the buyer-producer relationship. This results in further upgrading potential, erecting greater barriers to entry and ensuring, in the long term, that a handful of specialized supplier firms ascend as capitals with monopolistic power, who may eventually allow full package firms to determine investment, price, output and employment while being increasingly vital gatekeepers to Global South consumers.

Large buyers are increasingly agreeing to longer-term, larger-volume relationships with a progressively smaller number of full-package producers. The decline of assembly-only oriented garment capitals is part of a process, as Karl Marx (1867, 435) wrote, 'the larger capitals beat the smaller...It always ends in the ruin of many smaller capitalists, whose capitals partly pass into the hands of their conquerors, partly vanish.' Out of the concentration of the 'conquering' few, full package firms may emerge as monopoly capitals in the sector.

Beginning with the post-colonial Nehruvian state, well into the post-reform period, the India's garment sector consisted primarily of a domestic comprador bourgeoisie. India's garment firms acted as go-betweens for transnational capital, who were required to 'partner' with an indigenous firm as a requisite to operating in the country, a dynamic which is rapidly changing in the past decade. As we saw from the case in Ramnagara, these changes in the sector are both obstacles and opportunities for workers. Like GATWU, we can expect that if these trends continue, garment workers, sector trade unions, and anti-sweatshop allies will reassess strategies and redirect their energies. They may begin to organize and demand a greater share of value at the point of production itself, which, in time, will no doubt augment the bargaining power of garment workers.

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Consolidation within the Garment Sector and its Prospects for Labour

When the Commodity Chain becomes a Lever

Abstract

This paper is an examination of a 2014 strike at Chinese footwear giant Yue Yuen, in light of changing relationships between lead firms and manufacturers, consumers and producers, workers and bosses in labour intensive value chains. I demonstrate the connections of increased labour costs to capital consolidation, the growth of large vertically integrated Asian footwear manufacturers, and to greater value capture at the bottom of global supply chains. I find evidence of transformation in the roles of labour intensive firms, which previously served as “compradors” to monopoly capital, possessing sizable leverage vis-à-vis brands; and an aging industrial working class in China, which is adapting its bargaining strategies vis-à-vis the state, as new influxes of profit raise the ceiling for what can be demanded of employers, while also stimulating those same employers to pursue more aggressive means of holding onto their profits. In the example of the Yue Yuen strike, I detect stirrings of what may be fundamental changes in labour intensive production reflecting this new dynamism.

KEYWORDS: capital, China, footwear, workers’ power, monopoly, value capture, Yue Yuen

“It is concentration of capitals already formed, destruction of their individual independence, expropriation of capitalist by capitalist, transformation of many small into few large capitals...the laws of this centralization of capitals, or of the attraction of capital to capital...[are that] larger capitals beat the smaller...competition rages in direct proportion to the number, and in inverse proportion to the magnitude of the antagonistic capitals. It always ends in the ruin of many small capitalists, whose capitals partly pass into the hands of their conquerors, partly vanish.”

– Karl Marx (1867, 435)

Growth in Chinese industrial capacity has outpaced that of labour, causing a pronounced shift in the balance of power, since “bosses are short of workers and workers are short of patience” (*The Economist* 2010) despite reports of a

downturn in manufacturing in 2012 following a two-year wave of strikes and riots (Barboza 2012). Southeast China had become a hotbed of worker unrest, and, since strikes are not permitted within the law, the site of more wildcat strikes than any other county in the world. And as worker pressure mounted employers were forced to accommodate, allowing real wages to rise more than 7% per annum.¹¹⁹ Workers often succeeded in wresting double-digit salary increases from their employers (Friedman 2014). Indeed, ‘by the end of 2010, Chinese media commentators were [already] declaring that the era of low-wage labour had come to an end’ (Friedman 2012). Although tariffs on footwear were loosened earlier, the 2005 termination of the 30-year long global quota Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA), which limited garment exports from developing to developed countries, provided big industry players, chiefly global brands and retailers, an unrestricted path to relocate their operations en masse from across the third world to a handful of labour rich countries, ushering in a new era of consolidation within clothing and textiles. Thus, freer capital flows, labour shortage, and the consequent rise of labour unrest and wages in this way served to enlarge the power of domestic manufacturers, the global supplier, and direct employer.

I argue that the global relocation of manufacturing capital—a fundamental aspect of “globalization”—placed workers at a greater remove from those with executive power in the garment value chain, a remove now undergoing a partial contraction due to industry consolidation. The

¹¹⁹ This is also state policy, in part due to pressure from labour, but also as a strategy to steer the Chinese economy into a more “value-added”, technologically advanced direction.

combination of smaller capitals into larger has in due course produced monopolistic powers in garment production. The concomitant upgrading of industrial facilities drastically raises the price of market entry, allowing early-comers essentially to lift the ladder. I investigate whether Yue Yuen, the world's largest manufacturer of branded footwear, has reached this stage of maturation, to better understand the effect of workers' struggles within labour intensive production in China.

The study I use concerns a 2014 strike at Yue Yuen in China, the largest strike at a single company in contemporary Chinese history, which, effectively, updates the theory casting labour intensive production as 'buyer-driven'. I argue that, as firms in the region graduated from assembly-only affairs to integrated monopoly suppliers, a symbiosis obtained in what had previously been an asymmetrical relationship connecting global brands ('buyers') to producers ('suppliers'). Increases in supplier-end value capture may also, past a certain point, bridge the divide separating value capture from value creation in the garment sector, calling into question a litany of value chain theories, and bringing new emphasis to labour tactics targeting direct employers, who often now—if not owned by them outright---have a much closer relationship to buyers than in the past.

I attempt to augment the Global Commodity Chain (GCC) approach, which signifies the range of activities involved in the garment commodity as such--from extraction, manufacture, design, and marketing, to retail. I argue that the growth of supplier-end firms into larger, integrated firms, throwing their weight into high rent activities, affects not only the relationship between

buyers and suppliers but that of workers and direct employers as well.

Ultimately, I maintain that the power to shape the actions of state and capital rests with workers; rising costs, state interventions, commodity chain consolidation and the extinction of small firms—these developments bring the struggle back to the point of production to the workers themselves.¹²⁰

Background

Since the advent of ‘globalization’ in the 1960s, sectors with high variable capital -- toys, garments, and footwear, etc. -- relocated production from the global north to the global south. The subsequent ‘race to the bottom’ intensified the asymmetry between suppliers. In the 1990s, Gary Gereffi (1994b) and others began to advance theories under the rubric of GCC, noting the existence of new global ‘buyers’ (transnational brands and major retailers), which maintained a high degree of control in spite of widely dispersed supply chains. Globalized brands were able to select from a large pool of outside firms for every phase of the value chain – textiles, production, transportation, warehousing, etc. -- to capture the lion share of the value in the garment and footwear industries.¹²¹ Suppliers unable to reach the price demands of these brands risked the loss of orders. This dependence left them in a state of

¹²⁰ The study is based as an organizer in the transnational solidarity campaign with striking Yue Yuen workers, news reports from on the ground, and in-depth interviews conducted with NGO workers at Taiwan-based rights organizations some asked to remain anonymous.

¹²¹ It is important to note that there are some fundamental differences in the organization of production between garment and footwear firms. Tariffs were loosed earlier in footwear, and thus have had a higher degree of concentrations at the country and firm levels in production, consumption, and assemblage relative to garments. For example Merk (2014) notes that 90% of Athletic footwear are produced in 3 countries. However, similar analysis to both sectors since both sectors are identified as “low-technology, labour-intensive” (Scott 2006), “buyer-driven (Gereffi 1994; 2002), and are commonly used interchangeable in studies of the sectors (see Miller 2004; Schmitz 2006). Additionally, an analysis of the footwear sector may reveal clues as to changes with apparel, which remained regulated through the MFA until 2005.

perpetual precariousness, unable to muster the capital necessary to escape the orbit of brand power and pursue their own development.

For the past century the mechanics of the footwear industry have remained fundamentally unchanged. Brands and large retailers maximized profits by throwing manufactures into bidding wars. Factory owners, in order to stay afloat and responding to competitive demands, increased downward pressures on workers. Consequently factory-floor workers always straddled the poverty-line as workplace conditions continually worsened. The concentration of capital at the top of the supply chain—Nike and Adidas, for instance, control over 50% of the global athletic shoe market (Merk 2008)—has only served to further entrench this structure, which remains the key obstacle to trade union organization in the sector. Gereffi's (2002) theory draws a distinction between the 'buyer-driven' chains of labour-intensive production and the 'producer-driven' chain in capital-intensive production. He states that, 'producer-driven chains usually belong to international oligopolies. Buyer-driven commodity chains, by contrast, are characterized by highly competitive and globally decentralized factory systems with low barriers to entry in production.'

Within garment and footwear relocation to low-cost areas, in which lead firms resort to, what Harvey (2006) calls, a "spatial fix" rather than a "technological fix", was central to the historic growth strategy of global brands and retailers. This structure retains low levels of surplus value at the production phase of the supply chain, ensuring chronically low capital investment in industrial upgrading. In short: (1) Low capital investment in

manufacturing creates low barriers to entry, resulting in bidding wars between smaller firms (Gereffi 2002). (2) Global brands and retailers reward lower lowest labour costs, resulting in persistent downward pressure on workers (Anner, Bair, and Blasi 2012). (3) The global footwear commodity chain is therefore 'buyer-driven' (Gereffi 2002), insofar as brands and retailers make the demands. (4) Within this asymmetrical power relationship, worker action or organization results in order-loss, and so the global 'race to the bottom' must entail labour discipline (Kumar and Mahoney 2014). (5) The structure of the garment value chain draws value to the top of the supply chain, to global brands and retailers. (6) Thus the power of labour in the footwear value chain has been curtailed by 1-5 (Hale and Wills 2005). (7) Finding themselves thrown out of work by pyrrhic victories over factory owners, and too isolated to pressure international brands, workers have appealed often to 'anti-sweatshop' allies in the global north, to increase sourcing prices to manufacturers and make them more responsible for labour rights (Kumar 2014). (8) Thus the spatial divide separating areas of value creation from value capture left workers without a means of direct resistance which the anti-sweatshop movement attempted to partly ameliorate (Kreider 2000; Ross 2004; Hale and Wills 2005).

The dynamics of labour capital relations, however, begin to change dramatically as investment in manufacturing increases, a lurch away from the spatial and towards a technological and organizational 'fix'. When supplier firms grow, they purchase cost-saving technologies and expand, often along the supply chain, erecting new barriers of entry as they go, and fundamentally

changing the relations between producers and suppliers, workers and employers.

Emergence of Large Garment Firms in Asia

The MFA was signed in 1974, establishing a 30-year period of import quotas, to shelter countries whose domestic garment and textile industries would be endangered by a completely free market. When the MFA expired in 2005, the garment industry was transformed: production intensified, prices fell, and the number of producing countries dwindled. Soon China alone produced 40% of global apparel (Russell 2014). To this day it remains the clearest winner in the post-MFA world (Lopez-Acevedo and Robertson 2012, 2). Since the footwear sector, under a different regulator regime, loosened its quota system decades earlier firm consolidation of buyers and suppliers had already begun in the 1990s, and Milberg and Winkler (2010) maintain that geographic consolidation, both horizontally and vertically, became even more pronounced in “buyer-driven” sectors, such as footwear and garments, since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Concentration of production in fewer countries has been accompanied by concentration of capital in the hands of fewer firms (Azmeah and Nadvi 2014). In the post-MFA period, specialized garment producers based in Asia have grown apace; Korea-based Yupoong Inc., has become the world’s largest producer of hats; Datang is now responsible for more than a third of the world’s sock output; Taiwan-based Nien Hsing has reached the summit of denim production; and Panarub, in Indonesia, is Adidas’ exclusive cleats

manufacturer]. As Richard Appelbaum (2008, 70) notes, ‘we are now entering an era in which a qualitatively higher degree of integrations between production and distribution has begun to reshape the entire buyer-driven global commodity chain...[that are]... altering the relationship between ‘manufacturer’ on the one hand and ‘retail buyer’ on the other.’ These changes in the production process are a reaction to changes in the labour market, but themselves prefigure new oppositional forces.

Through the example of a strike at its facilities, I demonstrate that Yue Yuen, which ‘has emerged as a major economic powerhouse’ (Appelbaum 2008, 73), is rapidly attaining monopolistic power. *Monopoly power* is not meant to imply a single seller exercising sole proprietorship of a market (a rare phenomenon), but, as is in economic parlance, a firm with ‘sufficient market power to influence the price, output, and investment of an industry- thus exercising ‘monopoly power’ – and to limit new competitors entering the industry, even if there are high profits’ (Foster, McChesney, and Jonna 2011).

Workers within Monopoly Power

The labour unrest escalating labour unrest escalating in China since 2004 has been the subject of extensive reportage and researched (Friedman 2012; Silver and Zhang 2009). In the first quarter of 2014 *China labour Bulletin*, a leading Hong Kong-based rights group, recorded 319 strikes, a 30% year-to-year increase, mostly in the manufacturing sector. As a consequence of the labour shortage, changes in state policy, and workers agitation, wages have increased by 7% per annum and Chinese capital is losing its labour cost advantage. A new

era of competition has thinned the herd, leaving larger amalgamated firms with greater production-side value capture (Azmeah and Nadvi 2014). These dominant firms have reinvested their capital in labour saving technology, deepening their advantages in Chinese clothing and footwear production (Zhu and Pickles 2014).

The economy of Guangdong province, the scene of Yue Yuen's production, is constituted primarily of capital-intensive manufacturing, making electronics and metals. Guangdong's labour intensive firms, which once occupied a large segment of the economy, have left en masse. Firms have resorted to a 'spatial fix', relocating to other areas of China and Asia, where labour was cheaper. Yue Yuen survived in situ only because it possessed sufficient resources to effect organizational and technological 'fixes,' mitigating labour costs, while also relocated part of its production to Indonesia and Vietnam. As a conglomerate spanning multiple phases of the production process, across several countries, with control over price, output, and employment, Yue Yuen in large part meets the criteria of monopoly power as defined by Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran (1969) as well as Harry Braverman (1974), the leading authorities on the subject. Although the firm has not yet acquired full monopoly power, its growth represents a trend: a departure from the comprador role of the domestic bourgeoisie in the Global South. Monopoly should be understood not as an anomaly, or aberration, but as the logical consequence of competition, and the consolidation it engenders. Monopolization 'is in the DNA of capitalism' (Foster, McChesney, and Jonna 2011).

But what does industrial upgrading and monopoly power mean for workers? Wible, Mervis, and Wigginton (2014) describe Yue Yuen's parent company Pou Chen as in league with Apple manufacturer Foxconn, 'connect[ing] vast underlying commodity and labour markets that are relatively hidden from public eye.' They maintain that this 'sprawling web of supply chains can raise living standards, improve conditions for workers, and help alleviate poverty.' Indeed there has been an upsurge in discussion over how technological upgrading impacts social upgrading (Barrientos, Gereffi, Rossi 2011); however, as Selwyn (2013) argues, much of this literature is framed within an elitist conception of how workers gain power and increase their share of value. The suggestion that large, higher-value firms will of their own volition improve labour conditions has to be empirically demonstrated. Most of the surplus capital used to augment and enlarge firms is derived from innovations in labour exploitation.

Additionally, a combination of monopoly at both production and brand as well as the contemporary mutations of the state results in competition between "fractions of capital" within the "power bloc" weakening the forces of capital in its antagonism with labour (Mezzedra and Neilson 2013). A combination of the geographic limits of the capitalist state alongside an emergence of a multipolar economic landscape of power and position the development states as a mediator between the dominant "fracture" of dominant transnational brands and "comprador" domestic suppliers to meld a "total" capital. Thus, workers may be advantaged by this deepening cleavage and distribution of value within the supply chain.

As the case of Yue Yuen demonstrates, the growth of suppliers in labour intensive production does not automatically “raise living standards”, but constitutes a dialectical process. The sheer size of a company like Yue Yuen affords it the resources to endure minor episodes of labour unrest, outlasting and undermining workers, while pressing state and police into service as guarantors of its physical and financial stability. Size can prove a liability, however, by amplifying the effects of worker actions on commodity chains where large firms have integrated, fusing together successive phases of production. “If production is concentrated in a few giant factories,” Appelbaum (2008, 82) observes, “work stoppages can have a significant impact not only on the factory itself, which may have significant capital investment, but also on the entire supply chain.”

Both Merk and Appelbaum published papers on the growth of Yue Yuen in 2008, six years before the strike, which is the subject of this paper. I seek to apply and build upon their work while exploring the changing political economy of, and power dynamics involved in, labour intensive production.

The Yue Yuen Strike:

Yue Yuen Limited

Formed in 1969, Taiwanese-based Yue Yuen Industrial (Holdings) Limited has since become the world’s largest manufacture of branded casual and athletic

footwear, producing some 300 million pairs of shoes a year,¹²² or 20% of the global production of sports and casualwear shoes. Over a half million workers man its factories, churning out goods for more than 30 different brands (Lo, Wu, and Hsu 2014).

Yue Yuen, part of Pou Chen, the conglomerate controlled by the billionaire family of Tsai Chi Jue, grew quickly. “From slippers, we made sandals. From sandals we made shoes. From shoes we made sports shoes,” recalls a member of Jue’s family (Merk 2008, 86). Today the majority of Yue Yuen production is based in China’s Pearl River Delta Region (PRD), but facilities can be found as far afield as Vietnam, Indonesia, and even the United States. The firm maintains two primary divisions: one manufacturing footwear for transnational branded companies; and the other, much smaller division, for retailing in the Greater China region; selling brand name footwear and apparel directly to consumers, and as wholesaler. In recent years Yue Yuen has continued to expand; acquiring smaller firms in quick succession, and growing at ~20% per annum throughout the 2000s (for reference, the total market for athletic shoes grew only ~10% per annum during the same period). In some years its net annual profits exceeded even those of buyers like Adidas and Reebok (Merk 2008).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Yue Yuen became indispensable to industry heavy hitters attracted to its epochal innovations in turn-around time a cheap labor. Indeed, both Reebok and Nike would go on to name it their “most important

¹²² Yue Yuen is listed on the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong since 1992, so it has to make its annual reports including financial statements available. It must also submit some annual forms to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange [some data was accessed via Capital IQ corporate database].

producer” (Merk 2008, 86). It is during this era that Yue Yuen incorporated the Original Design Manufacturer/ Original Equipment Manufacturer (ODM/OEM) designation, signaling its entrance into the design field, and its ambition to bring all phases of production---from conception to consumption---under the Yue Yuen label. By the 1990s it had relocated its production facilities from Taiwan to China, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Yue Yuen now enjoys the advantages of scale. Assembly takes place in imposing facilities that employ as many as 10,000 workers and set the curve for inventory turn-over, emptying and replenishing stocks of product a full 5 to 20 days faster than industry competitors (Merk 2008). And, as happens in competitive economies, strength has led to strength, and out of one advantage---well-leveraged---has come another: technology. Yue Yuen’s laborers, though already the most numerous, can be said to do the least individually in the sector since they operate the most advanced (*ergo most automated*) equipment. While its competitors outsource more and more of their production, Yue Yuen expands and deepens its operations, integrating horizontally and vertically, and investing heavily in research and development. This catholic emphasis has allowed it to market itself as a one-stop, “full package” to global buyers, handling raw materials, assembly, design, and even distribution of products. As one Morgan Stanley report noted, the “smaller players without sufficient resources will find it difficult to match Yue Yuen’s services to its customers” (Merk 2008). Valued at a comfortable \$5.6 billion, “has emerged as an economic powerhouse in its own right” (Appelbaum 2008, 73).

But cork the champagne: something is rotten in the state of Yue Yuen. On April 15th, 2014, 43,000 of 60,000 workers employed in its Gaobu factories, in Guongdong Province, left their tools at their stations and walked off the job. Within two weeks one of the largest¹²³ private sector strikes since the introduction of market reforms, in the 1970s, had drained Yue Yuen of more than \$60 million in lost profit and exacted benefits.¹²⁴

Demand for Social Insurance

Chinese law stipulates employees and employers alike are responsible for funding the employee social-insurance accounts administered by local governments. Workers depend on these accounts for what they hope will be relatively burden-free retirements, often to their ancestral villages. And “if you don’t have social security, your life’s work will be useless when you return home” (NDTV 2014). Yue Yuen, however, calculated its contributions using a basic wage not accounting for overtime. Although the average monthly Yue Yuen wage comes to about 3,000 yuen (\$490), with the inclusion of overtime pay, workers reported employer contributions proportionate to an average of only 1,810 yuen (\$296). China’s central government confirmed the discrepancy and publicly accused Yue Yuen of “wrongdoing,” entreating them to take corrective measures. According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), labour rights

¹²³ Certainly there have been strikes that have been more expensive to the economy, in ports for example, as well as in the public sector but in terms of numbers of private-sector workers and length of strike this is one of the largest recorded, but the statement in this paper is based primarily on claims from activists on the ground (Valdmanis 2014) while it was widely reported as “one of the largest industrial disputes in living memory” (Borromeo 2014).

¹²⁴ Yue Yuen workers had had previously taken smaller strikes such as in 2008 in Dongguan over wages refused to sign their contracts and were locked out by the company as a result (Gongchao 2014).

activists had estimated arrears in the range of 100-200 million yuen (\$16-32 million). In light of this, Yue Yuen employee contracts were deemed invalid.

China's social insurance system dates to the early 1980s, and remains to this day an opaque and complicated affair that manufacturers either recklessly undermine or simply avoid. Large employers are wont to calculate social insurance payments using the minimum wage, while smaller employers find it easier to engage in complete non-compliance, and hide in the lower end of government priorities. Recently workers at Yue Yuen discovered that the company had been engaging in the former practice for years with, it appeared, the active collusion of local government officials. As *The Economist* (2014) observed, strikers' chants often mingled lyrics highlighting government corruption and complicity with those indicting Yue Yuen.

Yue Yuen workers complained that "the factory has been tricking us for 10 years [...] the district government, labour bureau, social security bureau and the company were all tricking us together" (Gongchao 2014). And the problem, it appears, is endemic. According to state newswire Xinhua, local officials often create legal loopholes specifically designed to attract capital. "Some local governments even allow foreign companies to escape payments to attract their investments," observes He Gaochao, a public affairs professor at Sun Yat-sen University (*taken from Valdmanis 2014*).

Yue Yuen did not back down. Its (alleged) allies in government employed aggressive police tactics throughout the strike, detaining, arresting, and even hospitalizing protestors. The state newswire, Xinhua, however, reported little of the strike, and contradicted all reports of worker injuries,

despite myriad claims to the contrary by international press and activists. Eventually, employees, facing threats and an overwhelming police presence, began to trickle back in, but began employing “work-to-rule” tactics through work slowdowns.

But by strike’s end, workers’ demands had grown to include a new contract, better working conditions, better funded government housing, an enshrined right to form independent unions, concretized assurances against employer retribution, and a transparent and accountable government to execute and administer all of the above. Thus, an economic demand—in this case, honesty in wage reportage (that is, pension and social insurance payments in accordance with the law)—gave rise in due course to further demands, for institutional and social reforms, which would consolidate and build upon economic victories.

A Strike Begins

According to activists, the strike had been set off by a Yue Yuen employee who, after putting in her paper work to retire, discovered that her 20+ years of service to the company—in a managerial role, no less—had left her with a mere 600 yuen (roughly \$100) in social insurance, to sustain her through old age. Understandably upset, she stormed off to a company dormitory. Word spread.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ *Phone Interview*, Taiwan-based labour activist August 24th, 2014. Additionally, this account of events is supported by extensive *Reuters* interviews (Harney and Ruwitch 2014). Some made the claim based on accounts from inside the strike, that a Yue Yuen middle-managers was the first to challenge senior plant leaders regarding unpaid social insurance contributions in late March weeks before the start of the strike. It was implied that managers spread the word of the

On April 5, 2014, several hundred workers at a Gaobu factory clocked in and promptly walked out; they then gathered at a bridge to block traffic. By April 14th, the strikers' numbers had swollen to 10,000 and come to include workers from all six of Yue Yuen's Gaobu factories--among them even a few contingents from management. Though only partial, the strike was already significant in absolute terms, since the Gaobu factories accounted for 10% of Yue Yuen's total output (Qi 2014). An army of riot police was dispatched.

Meanwhile, on the 15th, 43,000 walked out. Yue Yuen responded, offering to sit down with workers; negotiations fell through, however, when Yue Yuen refused to concede to any of the strikers' primary demands. "It was rumored," according to workers,¹²⁶ that "the company agreed to pay the full social insurance from when workers returned to work but not back pay, which was the central worker demand. Workers also wanted it in cash because they knew that they could not ensure enforcement of any agreement." A group of worker representatives were then arrested with the purported help of ACFTU officials (Gongchao 2014). On April 17th Yue Yuen announced publicly that it would pay the full social insurance beginning on May 1st, but not retroactively, and this only on the condition that workers returned to work.

In the face of this offer, "the workers [continued] striking, and the numbers...probably increased" despite "the factory releas[ing] a notice saying it [would] dismiss the workers if they continue[d]" (AFP 2014). AFP (2014) spoke to a Yue Yuen striker who said she and the other workers had been offered

social insurance underpayments and orchestrated the strike by encouraging frontline workers to walkout (Harney and Ruwitch 2014). This account of events is disputed by activists I interviewed.

¹²⁶ *Phone Interview*, Taiwan-based labour activist, June 12th, 2014.

welfare payments until 2016, but that she was not satisfied. “The factory could just leave in the middle of the year, and we might end up without welfare payments.”

On Friday, the 18th, the day that the wives and children of jailed Gaobu workers demonstrated in front of Yue Yuen’s district office, 2,000 Yue Yuen workers in the neighbouring province of Jiangxi, responsible chiefly for producing Adidas shoes, joined the strike and walked out. Francine Chan,¹²⁷ from the organization Worker Empowerment, described the strike’s propagation, noting that, though “some workers passed information through the social networking site *weibo* and the instant messaging service *qq*, [most of] the workers are older [and therefore] most of the news spread through word-of-mouth, [since] strike organizers had already developed contacts with worker leaders at other Yue Yuen factories during smaller strikes in the past.” Because of this the workers were more than able to circumvent the news blackout imposed by government authorities (*The Economist* (2014) reported that though foreign journalists were allowed onto Yue Yuen property in Gaobu, Chinese citizens had been barred).

Yue Yuen made a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange on April 21st, reassuring investors that it would return calm to the factory floor by raising workers’ living allowance to 230 yuen (\$37) per month, and promising to make up unpaid social security payments, though “the contributions [could not] be quantified for the time being” (NDTV 2014). Workers were informed through loudspeaker and fliers distributed by ACFTU, the official union. As one activist

¹²⁷ Phone Interview, August 24th, 2014

told me, “workers rejected this offer. Even if it sounds nice, workers didn’t know how long they would be employed still and this was based on future earnings. There were also no ways to enforce the agreement--plus the offer was tiny compared to the amount workers were owed”.

The next day factory gates were closed to workers, to prevent them from pressing their timecards (i.e.: and then leaving). Those who did manage to find their way inside were arrested when they refused still to work. In response to a call to arms by Taiwanese labour activists, a series of demonstrations sprang up in front of prominent international Adidas retailers, placing additional—albeit indirect--pressure on Yue Yuen. (Fortunately for the strikers, the recently formed International Union League for Brand Responsibility was already engaged in an ongoing campaign to exact worker protections from Adidas, whose retailers are conveniently ubiquitous--even compared to other major Yue Yuen partners, like Nike). Protests erupted in London, Melbourne, Istanbul, Hong Kong, Taipei, New York.

By April 24th Yue Yuen had garrisoned its factories with riot police. Four days later, the company reported that 80% of workers employed at the Gaobu factory, which the strike had started, had returned to work (Qi 2014). Labour activists and workers, however, accused the government and police of physically compelling workers’ return (Yue Yuen, it was said, asked that they “rectify the situation”). The AFP (NDTV 2014) compiled testimonials from workers who claimed to have “only returned because of intimidation.” One, who asked not to be named, stated, that “at the moment the factory is controlled by police.”

Eventually the company agreed to pay full pensions, with an additional living allowance, starting May 1st--but no retroactive pay. The offer, announced over loudspeakers on Yue Yuen's corporate campus, elicited "howls of derision" from picketers, who tore up copies of the ACFTU mediation letter in response (Economist 2014). The majority of workers understood this to not be a victory, and the irony involved in considering it as such was palpable.

Li (NDTV 2014), a 45-year-old sanitation worker, explained: "the workers were not successful: the government is forcing us back to work." Tan, a 17-year old worker in the accessories unit, put in his two cents: "Factory officials have warned us that those who make a fuss will be sacked without compensation," therefore "the strike has failed, we didn't get the result we wanted." But misgivings and all, the workers accepted and the strike lifted.

Yue Yuen estimated direct losses from the April 2014 strike at \$27 million, with an additional \$31 million in exacted concessions for 2014 alone (Qi 2014). By May 3rd, days after the strike, shares of Yue Yuen had dropped 4.6%, to a 5-month low. *Forbes* conceded that, "the strike and extra payments involving Yue Yuen... underscores the rising cost of doing business in China, the country's declining competitiveness for labour intensive manufacturing and investment" (Flannery 2014).

Failure or no, its influence was nonetheless felt. On July 21st of the same year, workers at a Yue Yuen factory in the Chinese city of Zhuhai in Guangdong Province themselves struck over slow social insurance processing, prompting immediate corrective measures by company officials. "At this point all the misunderstanding has been resolved," company official Jerry Shum announced

shortly after (Lin 2014). This was followed by a strike of 2,500 workers at a Lide shoe factory in Guangzhou in December 2014 and a 5,000 worker strike at Stella shoe factory in Dongguan in early March 2015. Then again, almost a year later in mid-March 2015, roughly 4-5 thousand Yue Yuen workers in the PRD downed tools and walked out once again in opposition to the reorganization of the production process.

Brand Reaction

Even before the strike Yue Yuen had begun relocating production inland from China's industrial south, away from the region's rising labour costs. Despite rumors and reports to the contrary (Qi 2014), an Adidas spokesman confirmed with me the official statement, that "the Adidas Group has a highly flexible supply chain in place. [And] in order to minimize the impact on our operations, we are currently reallocating some of the future orders originally allocated to Yue Yuen Dongguan to other suppliers. At the same time, we'd like to point out that we are not pulling out of the Yue Yuen factory in Dongguan and we have no plans to do so. A press release by China labour Watch claiming this is incorrect."¹²⁸ A few months later it was revealed Adidas had indeed shifted a number of orders to other suppliers but "at no point did [it] consider pulling out of the factory at Dongguan" (Borromeo 2014).

In the waning days of the Yue Yuen strike Nike chief executive Mark Parker mentioned at a press conference that Nike was mulling its own relocation of production, to follow the path of least worker resistance in China.

¹²⁸ *Email correspondence*, Ben Goldhagen, Adidas Marketing Director (UK), April 24th, 2014

But though “we [i.e.: Nike] didn’t move product out in this case, [we’re] staying close to it. We’ve been in a position to do that [...] we’re always considering it,” and that, despite maintaining “close contact” with Yue Yuen, it had “not yet taken a position on that” (Valdmanis 2014). He reassured the financial press that Nike had “a factory base where [it] can move product around as [it needs to, in order to] make sure that [it doesn’t] have issues with production.”

However far paying retroactive wages to workers would have gone toward rehabilitating its corporate reputation, it was apparently not enough—legal obligations or no—and Yue Yuen refused. Presumably, the strike’s end, in Yue Yuen’s eyes, had put a cap on its responsibilities to labor. As a case-in-point, Nike’s non-binding code of conduct includes a clause protecting worker compensation, asking that, “contractor employees are timely paid at least the minimum wage required by a country’s law and provided legally mandated benefits” (Valdmanis 2014). Yet Nike made no public statements during the strike regarding labour conditions despite protests at their retail-end across the world, instead reassuring investors on the potential relocation of orders in order to resume production.

Two months after the strike an article in *The Guardian* (Borromeo 2014) titled, “how Adidas supported worker rights in China factory strike”, analyzed how major brands responded to the strike.¹²⁹ As is commonplace during labour factory fires or collapse in the globally outsourced garment sector, transnational brands immediately disassociate themselves. Similarly with Yue Yuen, the brand Timberland, for example, stated that “Timberland products are

¹²⁹ As an aside, the article series sponsored by brand-retailer giant H&M.

manufactured in some Yue Yuen locations...but not in the locations that were involved in the strikes” despite being featured prominently on Yue Yuen’s website. While Nike stated it was working closely with Yue Yuen, but emphasized that this was not the brand’s responsibility but an issue between workers, Yue Yuen and the government.

The most far-reaching statement came from Adidas who stated, “throughout the strike, the Adidas Group was closely monitoring the situation and in touch with our partner Pou Chen Group... Pou Chen Group was in direct discussion with the local government and the trade union federation to seek ways to address the concerns expressed by the workers,” adding, “with respect to the arrest of two workers’ representatives, Mr. Zhang and Mr. Lin, we were engaged with several labour groups in Southern China, to try to determine where they were being detained and offered our support to secure their release. We also wrote to the Dongguan mayoral office, calling for his immediate release”(Borromeo 2014). Adidas attempts to place primary responsibility on the manufacturer and the local government as well as identifying itself as a third-party advocacy group who, alongside labour groups, were lobbying local government rather than an intimately enmeshed actor within the forces of production. Nonetheless, the recognition by Adidas that a modicum of responsibility must be assumed to ‘address the concerns expressed by workers’ is distinct from other brands. Indeed, this may reveal the efficacy of the global solidarity campaign of which Adidas was the sole target.

Every major brand has maintained longstanding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies that include “codes of conduct” which include the

protection of legally mandated social security. Yet, the brands either failed to notice (signaling incapacity), or did notice but failed to intervene (implying complicity). Regardless, it contributes further to mounting evidence of the failure in the regime of CSR and “codes of conduct” (see Kumar and Mahoney 2014).

The State, Permanent-Temporality and Social Reproduction

The Yue Yuen strike represents the largest and most significant private sector strike over pensions in Chinese history,¹³⁰ an indication of changing labour demography and an ongoing crisis of social reproduction in China. The shifting demand from wages toward pensions, housing, and other forms of social care is characteristic of China’s aging workforce especially within labour intensive manufacturing.

The age for retirement in China is generally 60 for men and 50 for women and the workforce at Yue Yuen are mostly in their 30s and 40s, with many having worked at the company for decade or longer. Seventy-percent of Yue Yuen’s workforce had been employed by the company for five years or longer (Gongchao 2014) meaning they had accrued more from their pensions and, unlike the high turnover that plagues workers’ struggles in the sector, many at Yue Yuen had developed deeper relationships with their fellow workers in their unit. An aging workforce is part of a trend across Guangdong where a labour shortage, especially of younger migrants from the countryside, have forced suppliers to find ways to retain employees for longer periods.

¹³⁰ Based on the assertion by Geoffrey Crothall of the China Labour Bulletin (Economist 2014)

Consequently, workers demands have shifted away from only from only wage increases and now take greater account of an economic environment in which factory closures, reorganizations, relocation, and ownership are now widespread throughout South China. The longer a worker is employed the greater the potential payoff after a closure or restructure, as such the possibility of closure means that demands around social security moves to the fore. Nearly eight months after the end of the strike at Yue Yuen, the *Wall Street Journal* (Magnier 2014) highlighted a burgeoning movement of Chinese migrant workers forging demands over pensions with workers identifying the Yue Yuen strike and agreement as the “turning point” which “sparked further worker actions”, citing a number of wildcat strikes and employer concessions around social-security coverage at electronics, apparel, and toy factories.

The focus on social benefits is also important for Dongguan’s population where nearly 80% of its 8.3m residents either moved in or are children of those who moved from other parts of China. Under the *hukou* system, Chinese law mandates that individuals register as either “rural” or “urban”, excluding rural-urban workers from state-subsidized reproduction at their urban residence. This creates a bifurcation between urban production and rural social reproduction (Schling 2014). Thus, the state is able to heavily regulate the labour market, cleaving social reproduction from material production, rendering urban migrants “permanently temporary” (Ngai and Huilin 2010). Internal Chinese migration results in split-households and so-called “left-behind” children who remain in the care of grandparents in the village. Thus the China’s internal “care chain” means that “elder care” is also an issue of

“child care”, or the generational reproduction of labour power (Murphy 2004). Although a Guangdong province law means that rural migrant workers are entitled to some social insurance since the late 1990s (Cheng, Nielsen, and Smyth 2014), the fusing of Yue Yuen’s demands around social insurance reveals an intersection between spatiality, temporality, gender, and an aging Chinese industrial working class.

For the past decade the central government has enacted a number of pro-labor laws in an attempt to pacify growing workers’ unrest, with the state acting “paternalistic” rather than specific demands of workers (Friedman 2014). It was a 2008 labour law in China that required employers to contribute to social security payments. The Yue Yuen strike is similar to claims put forward by Friedman (2014) who characterizes labour unrest in China as a form of “alienated politics” with a subsumption of class politics despite antagonism towards their direct employers, the local government, and the official trade union. Yet, contrary to Friedman’s claims, Yue Yuen strike was able to spread to other factories and provinces and effectively communicate demands and actions to the outside world despite a media blackout, and is therefore not entirely “cellularized”. Within this context, Yue Yuen represents a clear example of a growing trend in Southern China of workers striking for full implementation of the law. The state is changing tact from dominance to hegemony; that is to say, the authoritarian Chinese state has taken on a more coercive “paternalistic” character and ostensibly less antagonistic to the demands of workers. Clearly workers do not see the state as an ally, but workers’ demand for implementation of the law is marked departure from

previous decades that centered on demands on pay or factory closures, absent of a state legal framework.

Greater Supplier-End Value Capture

The mergers, acquisition and consolidation of supplier end capitals into large capital holding firms are reverberatingly altering the century-old structure of the footwear commodity chain. Yue Yuen represents the archetype of this phenomenon within the sector whose size, integrated supply chains, and technologically upgraded factories led to reduced lead times and costs, increasing the cost for large global brands to not purchase from Yue Yuen.

Through consolidation, Yue Yuen has been able to accumulate the necessary capital to invest into industrial upgrading, further reinforcing market share, and erecting insurmountable barriers to entry to monopolize the sector. Critically this process has meant that Yue Yuen has been able to accumulate considerable value in a historically low-value sector. Consequently, the firm has begun to exert greater influence the global commodity chain vis-à-vis global buyer.

Yue Yuen's power is measured within the commodity chain and against global buyers. The greatest power of brands in garments and footwear is in their capacity to seamlessly move production at little cost (see Moran 2010; Armbruster-Sandoval 2004). Despite threats, brands either refused or were unable to significantly shift production from Yue Yuen during the strike despite its longevity and brands reassuring investors of their capacity to replace Yue

Yuen. This represents a radical departure from brand action in garments and footwear production (see Kumar and Mahoney 2014).

The growth of firms like Yue Yuen makes replacing them increasingly onerous. The size, in terms of profits, of Yue Yuen now exceeds even those large branded firms who it produces for, with Nike and Adidas as exceptions; Yue Yuen has surpassed the annual profits of every one of its brand buyers. The effect of which should not be understated. The ability of buyers to dictate terms to suppliers has as much to do with barriers to entry as it does with monetary power.

Over the past decade, Nike, Adidas, and other branded companies have begun to consolidate both manufacturing and various phases of the supply chain under one roof by so-called “full package” producers like Yue Yuen. While major brands are outsourcing tasks Yue Yuen is insourcing more of it, moving upstream on the global commodity chain. Large full package agreements, like Nike’s, of which Yue Yuen is the sole manufacturer worldwide, functions to steel reinforce the high barrier to entry for competitors. Consequently, Nike and Yue Yuen have become “highly dependent on one another” (Appelbaum 2008, 80).

Yue Yuen’s horizontal and vertical growth, alongside its enormous production capacity, has allowed the company a greater degree of leverage when signing agreements with transnational brands. In addition, by developing ODM/OEM design capability, Yue Yuen is able to expand into a higher-value phases in the supply chain. As one director at a large Honk Kong shoe supplier reportedly told the *Wall Street Journal*, “If Yue Yuen said today ‘I won’t supply

anymore to Nike' then Nike would be scared" (taken from Merk 2008, 88).

Instructively, that not a single buyer moved a significant portion of production from Yue Yuen during the 2014 strike, despite the increased risk of labour unrest and potential for costly disruption, reveals Yue Yuen's critical position as 'strategic partner'. Over time this relationship becomes gradually irreversible, with the 'vanishing' of competing firms, deepening Yue Yuen's power to dictate prices, and dramatically reconfiguration the "buyer-driven" paradigm described by Gereffi into a kind of "buyer-producer symbiosis".

Thus, Yue Yuen's fully integrated supply chains brought under one roof a capability of producing a competitively higher-volume ready for market at considerable cost-savings for clients like Nike. Large full package firms become increasingly dominant within the regime of just-in-time production, in which low-inventory and faster turnaround times are central to capital accumulation. Yue Yuen's capacity has expanded so significantly that if Nike or Adidas chose to go directly to a standalone production firm in China instead of a supply-chain integrated firm like Yue Yuen 'the organizational costs might be too high to afford' (Lo, Wu, and Hsu 2014).

Workers' Power

Industrial geography strongly contributed to the labour capital relations at Yue Yuen's primary facilities. Despite Guangdong Province housing 20% of China's production, in recent years the province has witnessed rising labour costs due to labour shortage. Yet Yue Yuen retained much of its production in Guangdong, unlike many other labour intensive firms through a combination

of organizational expansion and technological upgrading. Conditions of labour shortage were thus optimum for both an escalation of labour demands and a burdensome to replace striking workers. In what Hobsbawm (1952) would call a form of 'collective bargaining by riot', workers at Yue Yuen do not have a union to mediate their concerns or stifle their militancy. Workers refuse company offers not through large-scale meetings, ratification votes, or through spokespeople but by simply refusing to go back to work. The risks of organizing such strikes are high, due to government spies or company-side snitches, so strikes are often spontaneous based on word of mouth and quickly sparked and sizzle out with equal precision.¹³¹

The size and longevity of the Yue Yuen strike is significant but particularly remarkable in a labour intensive sector. Yet the strike should not be viewed in isolation, but as revealing a shift in labour capital relations not only in global footwear but across labour intensive production. The labour intensive sectors once consisted of many small factories in which demands and actions could not cohere against a single employer, which is strikingly different at Yue Yuen. Yet levels of workers' organization were uneven. Striking workers at Yue Yuen had some intuitive sense of Yue Yuen's power in the global supply chain and the efficacy of the expansion, growth, and durability of the strike. The original factory in Gaobu was the most militant and organized but once the strike began it quickly expanded to all other Gaobu factories and neighboring provinces despite a lack of organization and a rejection of the official government union. As Friedman (2014, 1002) states, 'when workers do protest

¹³¹ *Phone Interview*, Labour Activist, August 12th, 2014

collectively, it almost never extends beyond a single workplace; to do otherwise incites harsh state repression.'

The size of Yue Yuen allowed for a coalescing of a singular demand against a single target, with strikes continuing even after the end of the original strike. Thus the strikes' escalation and expansion seamlessly then atomized struggles at small single-roof firms, undergirded the efficacy of the tactic. For example, Yue Yuen immediately capitulated to workers at the Zhuhai facility who struck for social insurance a few months after the end of the main strike, revealing the economic power of the strike to coalesce demands and serve as an example to the company.

Greater value capture at supplier-ends also begins to change workers' strategies and tactics. As stated earlier, the employer contribution to social insurance is often under-calculated by larger employers and completely avoided by smaller firms. The profit margins of Yue Yuen motivated workers to action, as one activist¹³² stated, "I've never seen social insurance as a demand at smaller companies where there are many other difficulties, workers I spoke to on the Yue Yuen strike knew exactly how much the company was worth and the issue that drove them was knowing the company could easily pay them."

Whereas a strike at a smaller firm would signal its death knell, Yue Yuen's size means it can absorb the liability of the labour unrest. This is indicated by both the \$27m cost of the strike and the company's ability to ensure the obedience of local officials and police as well as the inability of brands to either effectively pressure Yue Yuen or move production significantly.

¹³² *Phone Interview*, June 12th, 2014

However, its greater value capture means that Yue Yuen is also able to agree \$31m in workers' benefits. Despite the failures of the strike, and continued reported difficulties in ensuring the enforcement of the agreement, the levels of compensation are unparalleled in the historically low-value sector.

The demands and actions by workers are shaped and circumscribed by the capacity of the opposition. Historically global south activists in the sector would attempt to coordinate with global north anti-sweatshop activists to target the source of value capture and power in the value chain, but these strategies were markedly different during the strike at Yue Yuen. As Francine Chan said, "despite our efforts, workers simply do not want to target the brands, it is now easier for workers and activist because we can target the local manufacturer."

This is not to say targeting brand name companies at the points of consumption is not without not capable of exerting economic power. By the end of the first week of strike storefront solidarity actions against Adidas erupted around the globe. While the majority of cities where retail actions occurred were in the global north, some occurred in the advanced global south cities. In previous years strikes and other actions have occurred by labor, consumer, or even retail activists at the point of consumption predominantly in the global north. This significance of the Yue Yuen strike is that workers were now targeting retail at least partially in the global south, in places such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Istanbul. For example, in Istanbul it was garment workers themselves who protested at the shop. Asia's proportion of global consumption has seen year-on-year increases (Russell 2014). Thus the

multipolar world in which products are being produced and consumed within the global south reveals the possibility of multiple targets to attack capital by workers themselves as well as creating real bonds of south-south and worker-to-worker cross border solidarity.

Conclusion

The conventional wisdom of capital flows in footwear production is that profits are predicated on the global 'race to the bottom' where employers are able to choose from an almost unlimited number of producers in an arena with low barriers to entry. However, the concentration of many capitals and the emergence of new large-scale monopolistic capital in the sector is leading to industrial upgrading and the raising of insurmountable barriers to entry, which is calling into question established orthodoxy. These economies of scale that form out of the transition from comprador capitals to firms with monopoly power has the effect of changing the relationship between global buyers and producer with the potential to grind this "race" to a halt. Greater value capture at the bottom of the global value chain is opening up a space for workers to finally make greater demands on their direct employer, while at the same time, providing these employers the capital to withstand sufficient economic pressure and undermine industrial action.

Yet, it could easily be argued that the Yue Yuen strike, like many others, by pressing for labour law compliance are largely "defensive" and it is still unclear if any enduring organization develops from it despite its clear influence on further strike actions and China's migrant workers' demands for social

security. Additional research is needed on how economic changes in China are effecting the spatial, technological and organizational reconstitution of capital in labour intensive production. The Yue Yuen strike draws an initial picture, namely of a restless aging Chinese industrial working class with greater bargaining power against a vertically integrated and enlarged domestic capital. In a strategy that traces its roots to the early 2000s, private sector workers are utilizing a legal framework by which to uphold their demands, and these demands are not limited to single factory owners but spreading to other factories against a common enemy. Finally, economic leverage has spread out of the factory and against retailers, not only with allies in the Global North but by garments workers themselves in the Global South through person-to-person connections and material solidarity made possible by the emergence of a globally multipolar burgeoning consumer class. Thus fortifying the bonds between workers across the region, making a development of workers' struggles to meet the development of capital. For as Marx (1848) stated, "the real fruit of their battles lies, not the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers."

Thus, greater value-capture at the supplier-end is dramatically altering questions of power and production. It demonstrates that workers shape the actions of the state which attempts to placate unrest with labour legislation as well as capital: by driving up labour costs, limiting the spatial fix, and forcing vertical and horizontal integration, moving the struggle to the more direct and brutal technological fixes, which are clearly in the workers' court: the point of production itself.

CONCLUSION

Garment worker struggles are not limited to the cases outlined in the thesis but the cases are intended to be a snapshot that reveals trends in a larger phenomenon. As Marx (1977) famously wrote, 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness.' This is to say that workers' struggles grow out of the material conditions before them. This is not to imply an economic determinist narrative that reifies workers. The aim of this thesis is to understand the power of workers from across the world to organize themselves within and against the conditions of global capital mobility.

This research is not without its limitations. There are multiply phases within the global commodity chain, yet the primary focus of the research is on the garment production link. The purpose of the research is to understand the garment phase, but global integration and consolidation means that these areas of production are not as compartmentalized as they once were. The research would have been assisted by a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between these phases. In addition, research on the new terrains of garment production, such as parts of Africa or the Eastern Europe, would help with the understanding the global clothing supply chain. Indeed, understanding of the changing composition of sector would be augmented by an analysis of this changing 'spatial fix' and post-China garment production.

The struggles outlined in the case studies challenge conventional understanding of both labour power and capital formations within the garment

sector. It attempts to counter and update theories through struggles of the real existing working class across industries, space, and time. There is a common theoretical framework that runs through every case. Based on Marx's work, as well as ideas by scholars such as Jane Wills, Gary Gereffi, Rohini Hensman and many others that consistently appear throughout the five cases, the thesis attempts to come to a theoretical conclusion from different empirical vantage points. It may be an overly optimistic, or simplistic, view to insist that capitalism plants the seeds of its own destruction – that workers carry within them the tools to dismantle that apparatus which binds them - but by basing much of the research in a historical analysis, the thesis attempts to show that in fact capital is responding to the actions of workers.

The global relocation of garment capital from the Global North to the Global South stemmed from the action of workers, technological upgrading grows out of the need to undermine labour costs, and the consolidation of capital grows out of capital's necessity to undermine wages. The labour-intensity of the garment sector sharpens the antagonism between the proprietary class and the working class. It is within this context that an understanding of the efficacy of various methods becomes essential. But this thesis is not simply a collection of campaigns from below, but an attempt to assess the position of labour vis-à-vis capital. These disparate cases carry a similar fundamental argument without attempting to impose a universal formula for workers' power.

For example, in the first case of a trade union struggle in Honduras the company, Fruit of the Loom, was vertically integrated. This was an exception

and led to exceptional consequences, such as a protracted campaign at the point of consumption, one of the only democratic unions in the sector worldwide, and a collective bargaining agreement with significant pay increases and benefits. The second case on global collective bargaining analysed the historic tug-of-war between labour and capital in the garment sector. The dis-integrated supply chain led to a strategy that evolved into a global labour strategy alongside a global capital strategy. Similarly, the third case focuses its attention on the developments of a union in South India, in which structures built to exploit are now being transformed into expanding struggles, from material to social reproduction, from local to international, and from factory-to-factory. Finally, the last two cases address how the fundamental dynamics of the garment sector are changing as a direct consequence of the end of the MFA. It describes two cases in the denim and footwear sector of firms consolidating across the supply chain, growing in value, reinvesting that surplus, absorbing its competition, and ultimately increasing bargaining power of its workers through vertical integration. Thus the case makes global value integration, capital's consolidation, and labour's subversion of the exploitative apparatus critical to understanding the power of garment workers in the world today.

The purpose of this research was to answer to the question: *'How do garment workers build power within a globalised and mobile capital?'* Through the various cases we realize that different industries develop at different paces and their own unique oppositional movements. We see that the garment sector is not stagnant but constantly changing. Most importantly, we see that singular, seemingly isolated successes feed into larger global struggles. A

victory at a factory in Honduras is whispered amongst workers in Indonesia whose actions are met with solidarity in South India. Just as advances in technology and communications have been the bedrock of just-in-time production, today the actions in Guangdong bounce around the world and back, despite the efforts by companies and states to stifle them, beat them back, and rein them in. This is reflected in the materiality of workers' consciousness.

The cases (or papers) throughout this thesis are an attempt to treat workers as subjective agents and as active participants within and against global capitalism. This is a counter narrative to popular discourse and imagery of the helpless, 'voiceless', brown woman hunched over sewing machines, slaving away in a cramped corner of a room in unknown parts of the world. No doubt garment workers represent some of the most exploited workers in the world, and indeed that has been the hallmark of the garment sector from its earliest days. As I have outlined in detail throughout this thesis, this is due to the structural dynamics of garment production, but limiting subjugation to class exploitation simplifies capitalism into economic orthodoxy. Subjugation takes a life of its own and the oppression, the economic, and extra-economic exploitation of women has been the foundation of garment capitalist exploitation and profits. In this vein, this thesis is an attempt to put once irreconcilable questions of class and gender as both fundamentally necessary to be addressed to ensure emancipation of the working class.

A consistent unifying theory that runs through all five cases is to empirically present the dialectics of global capitalism. The actions of capital to

undermine workers' struggles simultaneously open up new opportunities for workers to change their material conditions. The single unifying theory that runs through these cases is that globalisation, like capitalism, is a contradictory and dialectical phenomenon. While manufacturing and the trade unions that operated within them have been decimated in the Global North, people across the developing world were being forced off their lands and into wage-labour. This primitive accumulation and proletarianisation led to untold misery and 'great doubling' (Freeman 2005) of the global workforce. More workers also mean more power for the 'worker' as a social force. The fluidity of borderless capital intensifies the downward pressure on producing firms and workers combined with greater workplace uniformity and technological advances are helping capital extract greater profits, leaving workers and nation-states increasingly powerless. Whilst at the same time these advances are also opening up new vistas for cross border linkages between workers and their unions. The post-world war 'golden era' saw the disappearance of internationalism and neoliberal globalisation required trade unionists to look beyond their borders for their own survival. Indeed, the universality of capital lays the foundation for the development of a universality of labour, synthesizing a Hegelian 'unity of opposites', as it opens up new terrains for profitability it also unleashes greater spaces for alliances and struggles from below.

I attempt to take account of the myriad of methods by which well intentioned activists, consumers, and third-sector organizations have tried and failed to find solutions to the depressing wages, an obsolescence of trade

unions, and an epidemic of factories collapses and fires that plague the garment sector. By highlighting some of the attempts of workers to beat back the onslaught of capital, the selection of cases from the global garment sector are not attempting to whitewash the real life weaknesses of garment workers within it. Rather, it is the intention to draw to the fundamental contradiction within capitalism itself. It is to say that the workplace uniformity, casualization, communication networks, supply chain integration, and other methods by which to maximize capital accumulation are not being refitted and subverted by the workers themselves.

Garment workers exist in a world that reminds them daily of their disposability and lack of structural power over their working lives. What I have documented is the universal desire by working people to strive to better their lives and the lives of their fellow workers. What is evident is the common yearning amongst workers in the past and present, in the North and South, East and West of this world to organize themselves into a collective, to stand shoulder-to-shoulder against an extraordinary powerful enemy with seemingly unlimited resources backed by the state apparatus, at a grave risk to themselves and the lives of their family. The cases within this thesis demonstrate that through the dual power of material forces and a common desire amongst workers themselves will lead to greater gains for garment workers within an era of global hypermobile capital.

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Appendix

Interview Log (includes only dates and interviews used in thesis)

	Name	Date	Position/Affiliation
4	Jeff Hermanson	August 23, 2013	Former Organising Director, ILGWU
5	Reyna Dominguez	August 31, 2013	Honduran Worker, CGT
8	Jeff Hermanson	August 12, 2013	Former Organising Director, ILGWU
9	Anonymous	March 17, 2014	Former Researcher, TEKSIF
10	Anonymous	July 23, 2014	IndustriALL
11	Athit Kong	May 6 th , 2014	C.CAWDU Vice-President
12	Anonymous	December 14, 2013	Inditex negotiator
13	Anonymous	July 10, 2014	IndustriALL Representative
14	Anonymous	October, 2013	League Leadership
16	Anonymous	November, 2013	League staff
17	Anonymous	November, 2013	League staff
17	Anonymous	December, 2013	League Leadership
18	Anonymous	December, 2013	League staff
19	Anonymous	January 27, 2013	India Trade Union Congress AITUC leader
20	Anonymous	November 9, 2012	AITUC leader
21	Pratibha	December 16, 2012	Worker, GATWU
22	Rajanna	February 6, 2013	Security Guard, Mantri Mall
23	Manodeep Guha	January 4, 2013	South Asia Coordinator, Workers' Rights Consortium
24	Pratibha	October 24, 2012	Founder, GATWU
25	Jayram	October 24, 2012	Founder, GATWU
26	Anonymous	October 23, 2012	CITU Official
27	Anonymous	January 7, 2013	NGO employee
28	Narayana Chetty	November 23, 2012	Chair of Labour Research at Bangalore University
29	Anonymous	October 22, 2012	NGO employee
30	Anonymous	December 12, 2012	CITU official
31	Anonymous	December 23, 2012	CITU organizer
32	Madina Taj	March 6, 2013	Former factory worker, Texport Overseas
33	Nirmala	November 3, 2012	Worker, apparel distribution centre
34	Anonymous	December 12, 2012	CITU leader
35	Pratibha	January 12, 2013	GATWU organizer
36	Raju	March 4, 2013	GATWU organizer
37	Jyoti	October 22, 2012	Cutter, Peenya factory
38	Veena	March 12, 2013	Worker, Peenya factory

39	Jayram	October 20, 2012	GATWU organizer
40	Anonymous	December 23, 2012	CITU organizer
41	Jayram	October 11, 2014	Warehouse worker
42	Ratnamma	February 5, 2013	Worker, Arvind garment factory
43	Santosh	October 12, 2014	Worker, Arvind garment factory
44	Kempraju	December 14, 2013	Worker, Arvind
45	Nirmala	February 6, 2013	Worker, Arvind
46	Krishna	February 6, 2013	Worker, Arvind
47	Jayram	October 11, 2014	Worker, Arvind
48	Kempraju	December 14, 2013	Worker, Arvind
49	Jayram	October 11, 2014	Worker, Arvind
50	Santosh	September 29, 2014	Worker, Arvind
51	Mangala	November 13, 2014	Worker, Arvind
52	Rajanna	October 11, 2014	Worker, Arvind
53	Krishna	December 4, 2014	Worker, Arvind
54	Jayram	February 6, 2014	Staff, GATWU
55	Pratibha	October 15, 2015	Staff (now president) GATWU
56	Jayram	October 11, 2014	Worker, Arvind
57	Pratibha	November 2, 2014	Staff (now president) GATWU
58	Anonymous	October 19, 2014	Investigator, Independent Labour Organisation
59	Jayram	October 20, 2014	Staff, GATWU
60	Anonymous	August 24, 2014	Taiwan-based labour activist
62	Francine Chan	August 24, 2014	Employee, Worker Empowerment
63	Anonymous	August 12, 2014	Labour activist