Introduction

Since the middle of the 1990s, the globalization of manufacturing has given rise to the globalization of industrial protest. Movements to improve working conditions have organized cross-border campaigns, bringing together labor activists and consumers in the United States and Europe with labor organizers, workers, and activists in manufacturing sites to protest labor violations in factories that subcontract production for large, multinational retailers. Like the corporations they oppose, the tactics of transnational campaigns increasingly work to affect a product’s image and the way it is marketed and consumed; furthermore, antishop campaigns themselves employ third world women garment workers—their bodies, labor, representations, and testimonies—in the production of transnational protest.

This book focuses on three protest campaigns against abusive labor practices in international garment manufacturing, an industry that exemplifies the most advanced forms of globalization, vertically integrated manufacturing and subcontracting, labor intensity, and corporate image making. By concentrating on working conditions on shop floors, in garment production regimes, and in transnational activist coalitions, my research examines the logic, origins, objectives, and consequences of transnational campaigns for workers’ rights. I am among the first to investigate transnational industrial protest through a multisite study.

I take the discursive and material formations of globalization and transnationality in order to put forth a critique of new imperial formations and to explore the gendered, sexual, raced, and classed subjectivities that are both remainders and reconfigurations of earlier colonial formations.
Methodologically, this work is centered on multi-sited ethnography and combines it with analyses of political economy as consumption and production, transnational activism, gendered agency, and the possibilities of new forms of labor organizing. I explore hegemonic representations and mythological economies of globalization and the place of the local, the problematic of political economy and method, and the formation of modernity as technology, as the particular historical contexts and localities of garment production bridge divides between the first world and the third world within a context of transnational activism. Throughout, I maintain an analysis of women's bodies as central to production, consumption, and protest; I question the ways in which gendered, raced bodies of third world women are portrayed as victims or models and what the relation of such representations is to criteria of consumption and production.

I chose to focus on transnational protest in the garment industry for a number of reasons. First, for the past two decades, the garment industry has been at the center of scholarship around the new international division of labor and the feminization of the shop floor. Second, transnational labor protest, with few exceptions, has targeted garment retailers, citing their piece-rate payment system, exceptional mobility, and the complex levels of subcontracting through which production goals are met. For both activists and scholars, garment production has been emblematic of globalization, both in its exceptionally mobile production practices and in its dual identity as a producer of clothing, or goods, and fashion, or images. Third, both have relied on women as producers, consumers, retailers, and models. The garment industry and the fashion industry have depended on, reproduced, and shifted gender stereotypes and gender relations in all aspects of everyday life. My aim is to connect these aspects of women's work—production, consumption, transnational politics, gender identities, and the relations between and image making—to relations of gender, class, race, and sexuality in three transnational protest campaigns in the garment industry.

I explore transnational, consumer-oriented protest campaigns against labor violations of mostly women workers at an export processing zone (EPZ) in El Salvador, against the use of child labor in Bangladesh, and against immigrant sweatshops in New York City. In these campaigns, I focus on the relationship between garment workers, transnational protest campaigns, and the coalitions of consumers and activists sponsoring the campaigns. The purpose of transnational protest is to connect corporate image with labor practices in order to improve the latter. Therefore, a study of how garment workers are represented in the protests and of the material effects of cross-border organizing campaigns on shop floors is central to an assessment of their effectiveness. My study of transnational campaigns for labor rights, and the coalitions that they engender, sheds light on questions of "global," and even cross-border, civil society. In fact, it calls into question the possibilities of creating long-lasting transnational social movements or efforts to widen citizenship on a transnational scale.

Since cross-border protest highlights the relationship of production sites to retail outlets and corporate headquarters, companies find it more difficult to leave areas where labor abuses have been documented. However, I shall argue that a protest model that depends on criteria of consumption and public relations campaigns does not necessarily make garment manufacturers more publicly accountable or improve working conditions. Although these tactics of protest seem to fit the new configurations of production, how are workers' concerns addressed in these tactics? If what we are witnessing is a new, global politics arising in response to new business tactics, whose concerns are being represented and which issues are being left out of the protests?

The three campaigns in this study brought together consumers and activists from the North with women workers from the South, and, through media-savvy use of workers' testimonies, targeted corporations that subcontract in the third world in order to improve labor practices on shop floors. Recently, corporations have become quite susceptible to attacks on their images, their brands, and their corporate reputations. In the past, companies like Sears Roebuck and United Steel were not subject to the same kind of vulnerability to their images and brand names. As more and more areas of life become commodified—with stores like Niketown, which in themselves are leisure destinations, and Disney Worlds circling the globe from Florida to Paris, from California to Japan—branding and advertising are an ever larger part of companies' expenses, profit margins, and expansion. This study opens up questions around the commodification of images and the new ways in which women's bodies are commodified in garment production, advertising, and protest.

Part of the expansion of advertising paradigms is that the image itself has become commodified: the image of the brand and retail outlet sells products, and it is that image that corporations try to protect, develop, and foster. We see this in the example of Wal-Mart, with its "Made in the USA" advertising campaign alongside its exploitative subcontracting practices, its
refusal to pay minimum wage to disabled workers in its stores, and its legal and public relations—focused attempts to avoid brand damage after the discovery of undocumented workers being locked in Wal-Mart retail outlets after hours to clean the store. It is this production of corporate image that activists now target, rather than production relations on the shop floor. However, the very focus on image has its limits in terms of what changes gender, race, sexuality, nation, and class operate in these corporate-focused campaigns?

When I began my research, I was inspired by the possibilities presented by coalitions that would cross the boundaries of nation, gender, race, and as a white, leftist feminist academic from a working-class background. I wanted to analyze and evaluate the ways that everyday production related to production, through transnational consumer-targeted activism, were being incorporated into the spaces of retail outlets and boardrooms, bringing the spaces of workers and sweatshops into question with Madison Avenue and Wall Street. While I began with a specific political concern about the labor rights of manufacturing workers under globalization, my research has shown that the position of women workers in both production and protest is complex, shifting, and very much dependent on new relations of empire, location, and hegemonic contingency.

This cross-border form of protest has come into being through the formulation of what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink call “transnational advocacy networks.” In the case of global antislavery activism, the linkage and Migiel Korzeniewicz call “commodity chains,” has been incorporated into the repertoire of contention employed by social movement activists. In the force of international labor codes and improved working conditions in garment factories throughout the world have emerged within groups and their governments are blocked or hampered or where such conditions have been met within the context where the “channels between domestic channels are ineffectual for resolving a conflict.” This work explores the re-organizing among garment workers and activists in the global North and opportunities are created through transnational advocacy networks? What are foreclosed? What is the role of class in Keck and Sikkink’s formulation?

In globalized garment production, countries or areas looking to promote corporate investment and create employment for their people will turn a blind eye to and often actively promote labor violations, as I document in later chapters. The most common violations include withholding pay, union busting, mass firings and lockouts, and even limiting bathroom trips and forcing the pregnancy testing of workers. Most garment workers are too afraid of losing their jobs to complain, unionize, or protest violations. When garment workers do protest, they are fired, lose wages, and in some cases the police or paramilitary troops have been called out to violently protect the private property of the factory owners and export processing zones. Transnational networks have brought worldwide attention to some instances of labor violations and worker abuse through NGO contacts, mailing lists, meetings and conferences, the Internet and e-mail, and protest actions.

When garment workers who are at the center of the transnational protest campaigns have been blocked from resolving their grievances, advocacy groups have stepped in and used their privileged networks, citizenship status, and access to language to carry out campaigns in support of labor rights. The work of the transnational networks supporting garment workers’ rights is an example of what Keck and Sikkink call a “boomerang pattern” of political activity. This boomerang pattern is used when traditional channels for political action are blocked and domestic NGOs “bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside.” How does such a boomerang pattern work in labor organizing?

Keck and Sikkink focus their study on human rights campaigns, and a similar pattern has emerged among many transnational labor activists. In some of the campaigns in this study, however, it was Northern activists, rather than Southern NGOs, who initiated networks for political action in support of garment workers, unions, and NGOs in the South. When protest originates among Northern NGOs, focusing on problems in the South, older imperial and colonial relations are drawn on, reproduced, and often reinforced even though the explicit goal of the organizers is stated to be otherwise. Because of such relations, the origin of the protest often has had a considerable effect on reactions to and the effectiveness of transnational campaigns in the target areas.

The initiation of protest by consumers, rather than by garment workers, raises a central question about a labor protest model that does not necessarily involve shop-floor organizing and protest by those in whose name contention is carried out. What is the effect of consumer-oriented protest on production practices? Under what conditions do consumer-oriented transnational networks step in, especially in the garment industry, where
the local groups consist mostly of poor, working women? I have looked at the ways that local relations of gender, sexuality, and class get taken up in the campaigns.

In garment factories throughout the world, women make up the majority of the workforce. The feminized shop floor is both a new phenomenon in the garment industry, the way things have always worked. Early in the twentieth century, ready-to-wear garment and shoe production was carried out by mostly immigrant women in U.S. cities like New York, Lowell, and Philadelphia. The globalization of production has led to a “new international division of labor” (NIDL) that has been taken up in the current period by producers and retailers, both of whom rely on third world women’s bodies for their maintenance, reproduction, and survival. Labor, and garment production continues to be seen as women’s work. The numbers of nonimmigrant groups of workers and union members in the United States to target immigrant and offshore workers for taking U.S. the tactics of the sweatshop, unions and workers in the United States have at times used nativism and racism in attempts to protect their own jobs.

Garment factories in the United States have used disciplinary mechanisms of immigration status, racism, sexuality, and gender hierarchies, such as holding employees’ immigration papers and employing people without control, local relations of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, and nation are put to use in the name of production imperatives. Their work on the shop floor, because it is in addition to maintaining their homes and raising their families in full-time, non-wage labor, means that women garment workers have to negotiate various sets of overlapping, conflicting demands on their time and energy on a daily basis.

Women on the various shop floors are relegated to the lowest-paid jobs, jobs that are considered to be naturally women’s work. The garment jobs that are given to women in EPZs, in factories, and as homework are seen by managers and the women themselves as being similar to housework—sewing, cleaning, and other jobs that require nimble fingers, dexterity, and care and attention to detail. Thus, patriarchal gender roles and representations are depended on to maintain high-intensity, hyper-exploitative production relations inside the factories that produce clothing for the retail market.

These everyday, gendered realities, both at the level of the local garment factory and on a global scale, have proved to be serious barriers to women’s organizing on shop floors and in communities. Two new aspects of garment industry protest campaigns have arisen in response to local organizing difficulties. Globalized garment protest is not necessarily shop-floor-based in that it involves transnational organizing and coordination; at the same time, it is very much focused on women’s bodies and production practices. However, consumer activism and attacks on corporate reputation have become central to transnational campaigns, making the shop floor secondary to protest tactics. What dilemmas are posed to scholars and activists when principal protest tactics include the threat of consumer boycott, protests outside company headquarters in the United States, picketing and leafleting of retail outlets in the United States and Europe, and the promotion of media coverage on television, radio, and in newspapers? What are the effects of regimes of vertically integrated manufacturing, just-in-time production practices, and subcontracting in the garment industry on the push for living wages, fair trade, and human rights?

**Productive and Symbolic Politics**

Scholars have identified the current period of flexible, JIT production systems and the new international division of labor as being marked by an increased globalization of production and finance. The literature of globalization has also focused on space as socially and historically produced, whose organization may shift over time. Such categorizations are useful in understanding the period of transnational finance and manufacturing as something new. However, a theoretical focus on symbolic exchanges and signs leads us to view globalization as something that takes place outside of everyday relations and production regimes. By exploring the relationship between transnational organizing and shop floors, I investigate the quotidian manifestations of what are seen as symbolic exchanges on the one hand, and their differentiation from relations of production on the other. In this way, I interrogate the notion of a global-local split, which, along with the material conditions of subcontracting processes, has made it easier for companies to pack up production and move elsewhere in the face of labor unrest or attempted unionization. This mobility of corporations, in turn, has become an even larger barrier to political organizing and contestation by women who work in export-oriented garment factories.

To combat the difficulties in pinning down global chains of production and subcontracting in order to enforce labor rights, activists have targeted the sweatshop as a site of both material and symbolic production. This focus has helped to reinforce the sweatshop as the ultimate other of more benign, more virtual forms of capital accumulation, reproduction, and circulation,
such as those of technology, media and cultural production, the welfare state, and, quintessentially, Fordist production practices. This singling out of the sweatshop—with its young, third world women employees—creates a site of exception to the day-to-day normal functions of business, a site of abject materiality that can be located—and bounded—outside the consumption centers of the United States.

The tactics of singling out the sweatshop have, furthermore, appropriated signs that depend on the languages and practices of consumption with a double-sided granting of agency, creating the sweatshop as something to be consumed by both activists and consumers. Because the tactics are directed at consumers of ready-made garments in the United States, privileged consumption of the sweatshop as part of the system of signs that circulate in advertising and public relations puts forth the notion that it is only through the tests, as they have been conducted with regard to garment workers' rights, that have employed sweat labor and consciousness-raising over strikes or other tactics of shop-floor-level organizing.

In other words, there is an assumption that those who consume have the right to act as political agents through the fact of their purchasing power. This double granting of agency has material repercussions in everyday events and relationships among consumers and activists, garment workers and activists, and consumers and garment workers. As such, the tactics reproduce the very class, race, and, in the case of New York–based garment factories, immigration status distinctions against which they were mobilizing.

The Nation-State and Globalization

Not only have the tactics of transnational organizing reinforced a split between the material and the symbolic and between production and consumption practices, but they have also maintained an analytical split between the nation-state and the economy and between technological innovation and production practices. While social science literature on globalization has moved away from an exclusive focus on financial flows and technological innovation to examine the nation-state and its position within global capital formation and metanational governance regimes, much of this research has worked within the paradigm of national versus regional or global autonomy. Saskia Sassen argues:

"Economic globalization has mostly been represented in terms of the duality national-global, where the global gains power and advantages at the expense of the national. And it has largely been conceptualized in terms of the internationalization of capital and then only in the upper circuits of capital, notably finance."

Dani Rodrik's conception of safety nets is one example of this duality; he advocates a certain level of state intervention in order to solve the problems associated with allowing capital too much sway. The duality of the nation-state versus flows of capital helps to reinforce the fundamental assumption of the nation-state that can be reined in by bringing corporations back home, to a certain degree, to the realm of the national. The literature pointing most emphatically to the current period of decline of the nation-state and the renewed sovereignty of capital exemplifies this top-down perspective. The relationship between the national and the global is not easily defined. Rather than seeing the global and the national as separate spheres that either compete or complement each other, it is important to explore the ways in which one constitutes the other and how the split between the global and the local is continually being delineated and reconstituted politically.

With regard to the concept of the state and its relationship to society, Timothy Mitchell argues, "we need to examine the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction ... is produced." Similarly, the global-local distinction leaves unexamined the ways in which national trade laws can be used to facilitate movements of corporations among places and across nation-state boundaries, or how the United States, for example, is able to maintain sovereignty in the face of labor market pressures regarding its immigration law. Mitchell writes:

"The distinction must not be taken as a boundary between two entities, but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained. The ability to have an internal distinction appear as though it were the external boundary between two separate objects is the distinctive technique of the modern political order."

Because of this distinction, politics of transnational protest in the garment industry—when transnational retailers are called on to act as corporate good citizens—is often unable to address questions of governance or accountability. When appeals are made directly to corporations, in the arena of the retail outlet and the stock exchange, they help legitimate finance capital as something both outside and above the workings of the nation-state. Corporations, in this model, become the final authority and are accorded
the ultimate power to grant concessions in their labor practices. In some cases, when appeals, supported by the threat of U.S. or international law, are made to corporations, they bring the state back in as an arbitrator. While acknowledging activists’ claims against corporate domination, this maintains an apparent division between the global, seen as the corporate; the national, or the laws of the nation-state; and international regimes.

**Commodity Chains and Labor Flows**

Gereffi and Korzeniewicz examine commodity chains under global capitalism, historically and in the contemporary period, and look at the ways that retailers and buying considerations shape production networks globally. They are able to demonstrate the various stages that production networks go through in order to produce a commodity that is then marketed by one company. Gereffi’s description of the workings of commodity chains is composed of material, spatial, and political components:

Global commodity chains have three main dimensions: (1) an input-output structure (i.e., a set of products and services linked together in a sequence of value-adding economic activities); (2) a territoriality (i.e., spatial dispersion or concentration of production and distribution networks, composed of enterprises of different sizes and types); and (3) a governance structure (i.e., authority and power relationships that determine how financial, material, and human resources are allocated and flow within a chain).

Sassen looks at international labor flows, maintaining that U.S. investment and immigration policy attract migrants and that they help to explain the creation of and changes in world labor markets. The consumer campaigns put such labor market questions at the center of politics and put commodity campaigns firmly on the policy table. By highlighting workers’ concerns, the actions, discussed by Sassen, in order to influence the governance structure that, after documenting labor violations carefully and calling for workers’ corporations by appealing to them for clemency and labor patronage. In some governments or unions—make all of the decisions about workers’ rights and interest. For example, high-profile protest depends on corporate vulnerability to shifts in retail position and public image. Such vulnerability shows that Gereffi and Korzeniewicz’s commodity chains can potentially work both ways: conditions or grievances inside the production network can affect the policies of retailers and corporate buying decisions. As Miriam J. Wells argues, “economic configurations—too often portrayed as the inevitable and value-neutral outcomes of changing global economic structure—may instead be primarily the result of local sociopolitical conflicts.”

Cross-border organizing in the garment industry arises out of the specific combination of transnational production and capital flows in a world of nation-states. While the nation-state and the international system determine labor and trade law, they also provide an iron cage of law that allows corporations transnational mobility and the freedom to act as if they are not subject to the boundaries of the nation-state. This combination allows corporations and capital the freedom to act globally, while individual citizens are subject to immigration barriers on the one hand and an increasingly ineffectual labor law on the other. These factors, along with the small amount of capital needed for garment production and the relatively quick time needed to complete orders, allow businesses to shift manufacturing sites to other countries in the event of widespread local protest, the enforcement of national labor laws, or rising wages.

An increasingly common goal of garment industry protest has been to push companies to adopt codes of conduct for labor rights and to establish a system of independent, third-party monitoring of working conditions by local NGOs and human rights groups. Ideally, cross-border protest that attempts to focus on production sites and retail outlets as well as corporate headquarters would make it rather pointless for companies to leave areas where labor abuses have been documented.

The three case studies I present exemplify the organizational methods of this transnational movement. Each case demonstrates new tactics of protest in the garment industry and in industries with similarly transnational production practices as employed by a number of coalitions that focus on labor rights. The El Salvador campaign was carried out by a combination of U.S.-based solidarity organizations and religious groups along with human rights organizations in El Salvador. The Bangladesh agreement was the result of a coalition between U.S.-funded Bangladeshi labor unions, the U.S. Embassy, UN-based organizations, and local garment manufacturers. The New York City case brought together U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations and labor unions. All three protests depended on consumer boycotts aimed at corporations with lax labor standards and relied on third-party monitoring to enforce labor regulations, but in each coalition, workers were represented in different ways.
Members of the U.S. Congress and the U.S.-based Child Labor Coalition began the Bangladesh campaign in 1992 in order to end the use of children’s labor in garment factories producing for U.S. manufacturers such as Wal-Mart and JCPenney. The organizers of the campaign were pushing the U.S. Congress to threaten economic sanctions if Bangladesh failed to enforce anti-child-labor laws in its garment industry. Pressure on the U.S. Congress was combined with a media campaign in the United States to encourage a consumer boycott of clothes produced by children in foreign countries. After the threat of sanctions and the consumer boycott, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) fired ten thousand child workers in the space of two weeks, thereby invoking censure, protest, and open letters in the press from children’s rights organizations and labor activists throughout the country. In light of a threatener with officials from the government of Bangladesh, UNICEF, and the ILO (International Labor Organization) to present a compromise to the BGMEA. Over the course of a year, the compromise was rejected, renegotiated, and finally accepted on July 4, 1995. Negotiations ended in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that created schools and stipends for the garment workers who had been fired, along with phasing out child labor and a system of monitoring by the signatories to ensure compliance.

The El Salvador campaign was carried out by the National Labor Committee (NLC) and other U.S.-based NGOs and U.S. and Salvadoran labor and religious organizations against the mass firing of unionized workers and the violation of labor codes at the Mandarín International factory in El Salvador’s San Marcos free trade zone. Mandarín subcontractors produced Old Navy, and Banana Republic. The El Salvador protest and its resolution for the U.S. manufacturer Gap Inc., which owns the retail outlets Gap, involved a unified push by labor unions, U.S. and Salvadoran religious and human rights organizations, and solidarity networks to improve working conditions at Mandarín. The tactics in this case included consumer boycotts in the United States and Europe by Salvadoran garment workers to educate consumers about working conditions. This campaign succeeded, by 1996, in setting up a “Code of Conduct for Labor Rights” for all manufacturers of clothing for Mandarín factory to enforce labor law and support the right to worker organization in the factory. The consequences for labor organizing, however, were troubling. The Sindicato de Empresa de Trabajadores de Mandarín International (SETMI), the garment workers’ union, was left out of the negotiation process, and by the end of the 1990s its membership had dwindled. A company union, Association of Mandarin International Workers (ATEMISA), which was created during the corporate campaign, in the meantime has seen its membership grow into the hundreds.

The New York case is part of the “Stop Sweatshops” campaign. The campaign brought UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees), the U.S. garment workers’ union, together with immigrants’ rights groups to protest the abuse of immigrant workers and the sweatshop conditions under which clothes are produced for retailers like Wal-Mart. Celebrity labels such as the Kathie Lee Gifford clothing line have been targeted in media campaigns carried out by UNITE and the NLC. The factories have also increasingly been targets of U.S. Department of Labor raids on illegal sweatshops throughout New York City. Results of these campaigns have included advertisements and lobbying by Gifford and Governor George Pataki of New York that focus on the elimination of sweatshop production of garments. Gifford was shown publicly handing out wads of money to garment workers from factories in New York making her clothing line. Since the Kathie Lee line also produced clothing in Honduras under similar conditions, for the first time labor violations in New York City were linked in the media to those offshore in the manufacture of garments sold by the world’s largest retailer.

**NIDL in Production and Protest**

The new international division of labor that marks global production practices often is reproduced in the politics of protest. U.S.- and European-based activists define the tactics of transnational protest that, in turn, are focused on corporations with retail outlets and headquarters in the North. Furthermore, the larger audiences of the campaigns are the U.S. and European consumers who buy the clothing made in garment factories throughout the world. The women who produce clothing also provide the raw material of their testimony, which is then incorporated into particular repertoires of contention chosen to appeal to consumers and to affect corporate image.

Keck and Sikkink, borrowing from Alison Brysk, have developed a typology of tactics that transnational networks employ in “their efforts at persuasion, socialization, and pressure” that consists of

1. **Informal politics** (that) ... quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move to where it has the most impact; 2. **Symbolic politics** (that) ... call upon symbols, actions, or stories that make
sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away; (3) leverage policies (that) . . . call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence; and (4) accountability policies (that) . . . hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles.36

While these politics of information, symbol, leverage, and accountability are tactically powerful, they account for the actions of people in only one site of the transnational social movement. Those in other sites do the work of making the clothing that consumers wear, as well as that of shop-floor organizing. They provide the impetus, information, and testimonies for U.S.-based activists who then carry out the politics within the boundaries of the United States. This complicates the notion of class for Keck and Sikkink and in the tactics and politics of garment industry protest.

Women in garment factories around the world, whether or not they have been involved in organizing protest on the shop floors, are the ones who "quickly and credibly generate" the information that is then used by the Northern activists to target Northern corporations. Although the information generated is intended to be used to improve working conditions in the factories that are the focus of protest, its generation by one group and narrativization by another tends to privilege the agency of the activists who are in control of the information's use and dissemination. Many of the women and men who work in the factories that are at the center of transnational protest are of much scholarly work on globalization have carried out extensive community and shop-floor-organizing projects in their own localities. Their agency, however, is often defined by and circulated through transnational protest and academic publications, such as this one. This lays bare some of the problematics of activist and scholarly transnationality, since opportunities for participating in spaces that are marked as transnational are already determined by one's access to U.S. media outlets, retail spaces, language formations, and dollars that can be used for consumer subjectivity.

While transnational campaigns have had a number of positive effects, within individual factories and for the industry as a whole, it is important to examine them as productions. This study, while keeping in mind the benefits gained through transnational labor activism, will analyze the production practices and labor relations that make up the campaigns in order to expose the problematics of global production and protest as parallel and mutually dependent formations. Within the globalized politics that results from consumer-focused, transnational labor organizing, the agency that comes from acts of witnessing and testimony and from shop-floor and feminist organizing is reshaped to fit the demands of image making and knowledge production. As I will demonstrate, the politics of information privileged in tactics emphasizing brand name and corporate reputation creates inequalities within each particular movement, even one whose goal is to break down inequalities on shop floors and in retail spaces and neighborhoods throughout the world.

Achievements and Symbolic Politics

The anti-child-labor campaign succeeded in providing schooling for children under the age of fourteen who had been working in the garment industry in Bangladesh.37 The MOU that resulted from the Bangladesh campaign required that export-oriented garment factories be inspected regularly for child workers, and most factories have been found to comply. Since the 1995 signing of the MOU, ILO, UNICEF, the government of Bangladesh, and the BGMEA have worked together to further the access to schooling for garment workers through the Earn and Learn program. In June 2000, all parties signed a second memorandum of understanding that would continue and expand the provisions of the 1995 MOU and maintain the factory inspection and schooling program. The Bangladesh program was replicated among soccer ball producers in Pakistan, with mixed results.

The achievements of the NLC-Gap campaign included the institution of an independent monitoring group at the Mandarin factory, which provided a model for NGO and human rights-centered monitoring in factories throughout the worldwide garment industry. At the end of the campaign, Mandarin rehired 35 of the 350 fired union members and provided greater bathroom and drinking water access at the factory while ending conditions like forced birth control. The campaign also had an effect on production practices and working conditions in the greater garment industry. As a result of the Mandarin publicity, Gap Inc. promised to examine the working conditions in factories of its other subcontractors on a regular basis. My research shows that the 1995 Gap campaign, the 1996 Kathie Lee campaign, and the 1995 signing of the MOU on child labor in Bangladesh were part of a larger series of antiewashop protests that called attention to worldwide labor violations. As we recognize these achievements, it is important to explore other consequences of the campaigns, their effects on the shop floors and neighborhoods of garment workers and on global production practices, and the possibilities for agency in each site—shop floors, neighborhoods, and unions, as well as retail outlets, stock markets, NGOs, and development agencies in both the third and first worlds.
The "symbolic politics" employed by transnational activists also has had perverse consequences, since the symbols, actions, and stories that are called on have particular histories of race, gender, class, and nation that often go unrecognized in their appropriation. In the case of the transnational labor campaigns, the target audience is made up of consumers who, while being conscientious, rely on the logic and signs of advertising regimes on the one hand and on colonial legacies of race, gender, and sexuality on the other.

Transnational activists' strategies of focusing on advertising, corporate reputation, and consumption raise two serious concerns. First, the very language of consumption and consumer agency relies on exclusions and performances of identity of national currency, and, in the United States, they depend exclusively on the same time, advertising regimes rely on exclusions and performances of identity that are bound by particular nation-spaces through the circulation of gender, race, and class discourses that idealize particular notions of woman-side of the ideal and outside of a nation-space bounded by dollars. If political brand or country, the action itself depends on people with access to money and sites from which to buy the boycotted or embargoed product.

Within the idealized notion of consumption relations, shopping often becomes central to desire and longing for the familiar while at the same time taking place outside this consumption paradigm—in productive work, shop-floor organizing, or "fair trade" initiatives—is framed in ways that make it politically appealing in the North, often mirroring both advertising images and colonialist tropes. This transnational frame, in turn, determines the materiality, within the discourse of the global. These frames of globalization forms that production and consumption take, both symbolically and materially, within the discourse of the global. These frames of globalization and transnationality, which at the same time focus on the retail, also determine which actors and which forms of agency are privileged and which are not.

Even as I take on the discursive production of globalization and transnationality centered on consumption, I do not assume that the category of consumers is a monolithic one or that it is homogeneous in terms of race, class, sexuality, gender, or geographical location. Rather, I look at the ways

and Sickink depends on appealing to and calling on powerful actors—in the case of transnational labor protest, corporate heads and celebrity spokespeople—to implement and advocate the demands of the transnational campaigns. Not only does the reliance on powerful actors grant those with power a privileged political position precisely because of their own compromise with and maintenance of capital relations, it also depends explicitly on the patronage and sense of noblesse oblige of retailers and stockholders to concede to consumer demands. In other words, consumer-based protest depends on corporations seeing the effects on their bottom line and voluntarily becoming good global citizens. The sustained agency of women in local communities, as garment workers, consumers, participants, and activists, is often sacrificed, and in some cases curtailed, in favor of corporate-directed "global" politics.

Finally, transnational labor protest has relied on consumer activism working within a political economy of signs and symbols where value is reproduced and added through the promulgation of brand names and trademarks. The very attacks on corporate image may serve, in the end, to reproduce the primacy of brand name through regimes of conscientious consumption. By naturalizing the "new" political economy, with its globalized circuits of capital and corporate reputation, we grant credence to the assumption that we are all equally victims of the totality of capital—manned consumers, exploited workers, and well-intentioned corporate heads. This denies the continued hierarchy of nation-states and the fact that, even in the discourse of the transnational and the global, there still remain concentrations of power that draw from notions of modernity and difference on the one hand and the privileges of capital on the other. The everyday struggles and negotiations of transnational capital and the meaning of those struggles are often played down in favor of a political focus on the metonymy of globalization. Is it, in fact, inevitable that market forms of justice prevail over other worldviews in the form of the globalized political participation of conscientious consumption?

This particular form of globalized political participation has come about with the reinvention of the sweatshop as what Mitchell calls the "constructive outside" of capitalist modernity. His discussion of "the displacements opened up by the different spaces of the non-West and the ways in which this space is made to appear different" is helpful here. The sweatshop performs a double role, being both central to capitalist production relations in certain manufacturing sectors and incompatible with the progressive rationalization of production and the humane treatment of workers. Mitchell argues with reference to modernity: "Elements that appear incompatible

with what is modern. Western, or capitalist are systematically subordinated and marginalized, placed in a position outside of the unfolding of history. Yet in the very processes of their subordination and exclusion, it can be shown, such elements infiltrate and compromise that history."

The different space of the sweatshop within the history of a progressive, rationalized capitalism is performed both in corporations' own narratives of their production practices and in the conceptualization of the global sweatshop held by U.S.-based consumers, scholars, and activists. In this different space, workers themselves are viewed as outside progressive capitalist narratives, and their agency as producers is thus circumscribed. Because of this conceptualization of the sweatshop, it is only through practices of consumption, in sites that are within the realm of the modern, or postmodern, that agency can be recognized as such.

This project focuses on six major questions and implications of transnational protest in the garment industry. In chapter 1, "Children, Schools, and Labored Questions," I look at specific issues of agency and citizenship within the context of the U.S.-sponsored campaign against the use of child labor in Bangladesh's export-oriented garment industry. The campaign, which brought together U.S. politicians, the U.S. State Department, and UN organizations, pushed to end the employment of children under the age of fourteen in Bangladesh's export-oriented garment industry. It was resolved in 1995 with the signing of the MOU that phased out child labor by placing underage garment workers, with the support of a monthly stipend, into nonformal schools set up by local NGOs and regularly inspected by signatories of the MOU. The proposed consumer boycotts, the U.S. congressional legislation, and the MOU had unforeseen effects in Bangladesh. I explore the anti-child-labor campaign and its consequences through an analysis of the symbolic politics of child labor and the notions of agency that informed the campaign and its resolution. To determine who participated and how in the anti-child-labor campaign involves examining various assumptions about the position of children, women, garment workers, and citizens in Bangladesh, the United States, and other sites of export-oriented industrialization throughout the world.

Chapter 2, "Organizing in Times of (Post)War," addresses the possibilities of transnational labor organizing and the legacies of the 1980s civil war in El Salvador. Through an analysis of the 1995 Gap campaign carried out by the New York–based National Labor Committee, I explore the position of the shop floor within the parameters of globalized production and protest. My research in this chapter includes interviews, factory visits, and participant observation to look at the on-the-ground consequences
of coalition politics that organized around issues of workers' rights at the Mandarin International garment factory in El Salvador. I argue that the shop floor is incorporated into the campaign as part of a conceptual and material split between the local and the global, which has implications for both the sites and methods of transnational organizing and depends on the denial of multiple histories of organizing, militarism, and countersurgency and gendered agency.

Chapter 3, "The Ideal of Transnational Organizing," takes up the question of symbolic politics by looking at the ways that gender, race, class, and New York City. I analyze the 1996 NLC-UNITE protest campaign against the line of clothing in Honduras and New York City. A century ago, questions in consumer-based, government-directed campaigns and in shop-floor sweatshop movement differs from its predecessors both in its global focus and in its increasing focus on brand names and advertising image. I explore the ways in which Kathie Lee Gifford and her line of clothing were used to increase profits and then to protest working conditions in the garment industry.

In chapter 4, "Disciplining Bodies," I explore questions of labor regulation and discipline on the factory floor and in protest campaigns. I focus on sweatshop conditions in different sites of garment production and the ways in which they are addressed politically. Specifically, I look at the manifestation of Fordist regulation in El Salvador's Lempa factory, the deployment and the lockout of more than five thousand workers from the Youngone factory, a Bangladeshi EPZ. These methods of discipline and regulation as post-Fordist. This chapter demonstrates that consumer campaigns methods of labor discipline are often redeployed and reinforced within the very actions taken to contest them.

Chapter 5, "Women First?" looks at the gender makeup of the industry and the problematic of the new international division of labor within transnational labor campaigns. I investigate gender relations on the factory floors and among participants in the protest campaigns. In this chapter, I return to Mandarin and compare it to a campaign that was organized around an incident in which hundreds of women at the DINDEX factory in El Salvador collapsed in the space of a few hours. Both of these cases from El Salvador resemble the ongoing efforts to organize women being carried out in Bangladesh by the activist research group UBING (a Bengali acronym for Research on Alternatives to Development). While all three organizing efforts have been successful in a number of ways, I argue that local relations and histories matter as much as, if not more than, the organization of labor campaigns at the transnational level.

In chapter 6, "Living Proof," I explore the uses, meanings, provisions, and circulation of living proof by garment workers that is manifested in testimony and witnessing, in their gendered and raced bodies, in their production and relations and their possibilities for consumption, and in their discussions of their hopes, pain, and agency within both transnational protest and production. I also address my position as a North American researcher and call into question my own complicity in circulating testimony and living proof by putting forth a critique in the name of radical practice while building my career on theorizing garment workers' subaltern subject positions.

Finally, in the epilogue, I discuss the circulation of images, commodities, and gender in the production, marketing, and protest of the garment industry. I further explore the three central themes of this study: how the global-local split present in the discourse of globalization is reproduced in transnational labor protest; the use of symbolic politics in the campaigns and on the shop floor; as well as at the centrality of relations of gender, race, class, and nation to global garment production and protest; and a reaffirmation of the need to focus on the many-layered negotiations and contestations of politics in all localities, and the equally important need to place women at the center of protest over the new global sweatshop. Activists and scholars alike have to investigate ways to shift transnational organizing paradigms away from globalized discursive formations that retain power in metropolitan centers and deny the privileges of the nation-state and to redistribute resources, access, representations, and labor practices in more inclusive, encompassing ways. We have to work against and within the contingencies of hegemony. One step toward that goal would be to recognize that women garment workers, on whom the entire network of economic, political, and social relations is based, are subjects of transnational protest and producers of the global even as they are taken up in the service of Other agendas, imperial and otherwise.