

“We made it!”

The efforts of international NGOs to push for the enactment and implementation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh after the Rana Plaza disaster

Daphne van Es

5674654

Utrecht University

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dr. Chris van der Borgh

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List of abbreviations

BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
CCC	Clean Clothes Campaign
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Organisation for International Cooperation)
GSP	Generalised System of Preferences
ILRF	International Labor Rights Forum
ITGLWF	International Textile, Garment, and Leatherworkers Federation
MFA	Multifibre Arrangemen
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSN	Maquila Solidarity Network
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
SAF	Strategic action field
TAN	Transnational advocacy networks
TNC	Transnational companies
WRC	Worker Rights Consortium

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1.Introduction

1.1. Introduction

By May 15, 2013, more than forty global apparel companies had signed an unprecedented accord to improve the fire and building safety conditions in their supplying factories in Bangladesh.¹ The enactment of this accord, called the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, followed the deadliest accident in the garment industry to date: the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Savar, Bangladesh.² On Wednesday April 24, 2013, the building came crashing down, causing the death of 1,138 garment workers.³

According to critics, the disaster should be seen in the light of a dysfunctional economic system, in which workers' rights are structurally subordinate to making profits. The mechanisms of market concentration and outsourcing, combined with the capitalist urge of large transnational companies (TNCs) for profits has led to a "race to the bottom" – i.e. Southern countries competing with each other over orders from Northern retailers, by cutting back on wages and working conditions.⁴ It has resulted in an industry that is characterised by wages that are too low to cover the costs of one's basic needs, no freedom of association, the constant threat of being dismissed, an unsafe working place with no access to clean drinking water, and ongoing discrimination against women and migrants.⁵

Usually, Northern citizens and consumers can easily turn a blind eye to these practices. The wrongs behind t-shirts as cheap as \$ 3 are carefully kept out of sight. Yet, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building caused a global outrage, followed by questions of responsibility and blame. Western non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in the anti-sweatshop network – such as The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF), Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), and the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) – seized the disaster as a window of opportunity to induce companies to sign a binding agreement, aimed at the improvement of the fire and building safety conditions in Bangladeshi garment factories. The methods and outcomes of their campaign is the focus of this thesis. Hence, the key question guiding this research is:

How have Western NGOs pushed for the enactment and implementation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh in the strategic action field of the global garment industry?

The objective of the research is to address the tactics and influence of relatively small organisations facing large, influential companies in a David versus Goliath-kind of way. Achieving apparel companies to sign the Accord has been a unique accomplishment, amongst others due to its legally binding nature. Analysing the enactment and implementation of the Accord may yield valuable lessons for NGOs in similar situations. Academically, the thesis will add to social movement theory and related academic traditions by building on the work of Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam on strategic action fields and the work of Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink on transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and NGOs. Merging these two produces an analytical frame that takes into account both contextual and NGO-specific factors. Before discussing these approaches and their combination more in-depth in chapter 2, the research design and methodology will be explained and the structure of the thesis will be outlined.

1.2. Research design and methodology

The combination of the general, context-centred approach of Fligstein and McAdam and the theoretical elaboration on tactics and influence by TANs (and NGOs) by Keck and Sikkink is chosen

¹ "We made it! - Global Breakthrough as Retail Brands sign up to Bangladesh Factory Safety Deal," CCC, last modified May 15, 2013, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2013/05/16/global-breakthrough-as-retail-brands-sign-up-to-bangladesh-factory-safety-deal>.

² Lucy Siegle, "Fashion still doesn't give a damn about the deaths of garment workers," *The Guardian*, May 5, 2013; Robin Pagnamenta, "Eight die in new fire as clothes factory death toll rises," *The Times*, May 10, 2013.

³ Saad Hammadi, Jason Burke, and Rebecca Smithers, "Factory collapse kills garment workers," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2013; Sarah Butler, "Factory owners' legal threat on safety deal," *The Guardian*, May 27, 2014.

⁴ Shae Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders* (Sterling: Kumarian Press 2011), 14-15.

⁵ "Issues," Clean Clothes Campaign, last modified April 29, 2013, <https://cleanclothes.org/issues>.

to arrive at an analytical framework that can be used to give a general overview of the context and dynamics of the global garment industry, while at the same time giving suitable attention to the unique features of NGOs. In this way, the analytical framework enables the analysis of the research subject as a “case of embedded strategic action.”⁶ This corresponds with Giddens’ notion of the duality of structure and agency, which states that actors can act purposively, but are not entirely free to do so as they are still informed by the social structure in which they are placed. A continuous dialectic relationship exists, in which agency sustains or alters structure and structure informs agency.⁷ In Fligstein and McAdam’s field theory, structure is embodied by the strategic action field and the broader field environment, while agency is put forward as strategic action, or “how embedded social actors seek to fashion and maintain order in a given field”.⁸ Actors are bound by structure in the sense that the social order in which they find themselves enables and constrains possible courses of action. In a strategic action field, a set of shared understandings about the roles and rules in the field creates actors’ repertoires of behaviours. Yet, at the same time, these structures are the outcomes of actions by individual and collective actors.⁹ Fligstein and McAdam write:

“... individuals or groups are always acting and they are always looking for an edge. But it is the structuring of those fields that determines which kinds of action make sense. The position we occupy in a field has a huge effect on how we enact our capacity for agency.”¹⁰

In *Activists beyond Borders*, Keck and Sikkink label TANs as type of structure, i.e. “as patterns of interactions among organizations and individuals.”¹¹ Yet, networks as an entity have their own kind of agency, carried out by members acting on its behalf. Thus, also Keck and Sikkink uphold the duality of structure and agency, as they conclude: “Our approach to these transnational interactions must therefore be both structural and actor-centered.”¹²

Interpreting the research puzzle as a case of embedded strategic action means that data should be gathered both on the overall strategic action field and on the specific actions of NGOs. Hence, a qualitative research method is applied to analyse the responses of NGOs to the Rana Plaza disaster and the influence of the Accord and to interpret these topics in the light of the overall structure of the strategic action field of the global garment industry.

Data collection and analysis has taken place in four phases: (1) initial data collection regarding the strategic action field of the global garment industry, the Rana Plaza disaster and the responses of NGOs; (2) analysis of the findings; (3) data collection regarding the Accord, its implementation, and its influence on the strategic action field, and additional data collection concerning the topics of phase 2; and (4) final analysis.

The first phase entailed the initial data collection regarding four sub-questions: (1) How did the global garment industry look like during stability, preceding the Rana Plaza disaster?; (2) What happened during the Rana Plaza disaster and its aftermath, and how was the disaster seen by relevant actors?; (3) How did NGOs push for the enactment and implementation of the Accord in response to the Rana Plaza-disaster?; and (4) What role did key external actors/ play in precipitating the episode, shaping its trajectory, and ultimately helping to affect a new field settlement? With regard to the first sub-question, data was collected through secondary analysis of academic literature on the global garment industry and through content analysis of newspaper articles, assessments by the World Bank, World Trade Organisation, Forbes, Freedom House, etc., and annual reports of relevant companies and organisations. In order to answer sub-questions 2 – 4, data was mainly collected through content analysis of newspapers articles and statements by the selected NGOs, amongst others through social media, press releases, reports, and regular media. In order to verify or complement these findings, secondary analysis of academic research was used as well. During the second phase of the research, the found data – which was categorised and stored in a database – was analysed in order to identify

⁶ Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* (New York: Oxford University Press 2012), 183.

⁷ Jolle Demmers, *Theories of violent conflict : an introduction* (London: Routledge 2012), 119-120.

⁸ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 3.

⁹ Ibid., 4-7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 180.

¹¹ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders : Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press 1998), 5.

¹² Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, 5.

and interpret patterns guided by the theoretical framework. The third phase concerned filling the gaps in the collected data regarding sub-questions 1 – 4 and collecting data regarding two other sub-questions: (5) What stages of influence have NGOs achieved regarding companies; and (6) How has the Accord altered the strategic action field of the global garment industry? Data was collected through content analysis of the websites and reports of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety, NGOs, and companies. Finally, the fourth phase of the research entailed another round of data analysis. Again, the objective was to identify and interpret patterns.

With regard to all data, a qualitative research method has been applied and data sources were selected through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Academic literature has been found in the databases of Google Scholar, Scopus, and the library of Utrecht University. Newspaper articles have been found in the database of LexisNexis. *The Financial Express* and *The New Nation* were selected on the basis of origin (Bangladesh), language (English), and output (most articles on the Rana Plaza disaster and related topics). *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The New York Times* were selected on the basis of origin (United Kingdom and United States of America), language (English), and their reputation as being high-quality news sources.

Finally, the four NGOs were selected because of their prominence in the anti-sweatshop network and because of their involvement in the Accord as witness signatories. In order to triangulate the data, semi-structured in-depth interviews with these NGOs were requested. However, due to the lack of sufficient resources on the part of these organisations, these requests could not be honoured.

1.3. Chapter outline

Informed by the research question, this thesis will combine three subjects: (1) the strategic action field of the global garment industry, (2) the Rana Plaza disaster and the subsequent push by NGOs for the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, and (3) the Accord and an evaluation of the impact of NGOs. First, in the second chapter, the analytical framework guiding the research will be discussed. By a combination of the work of Fligstein and McAdam on strategic action fields and the work of Keck and Sikkink on transnational advocacy networks, a framework will be developed. The third chapter will focus on the strategic action field of the global garment industry. The characteristics of the field will be discussed, even as the important actors – transnational companies as incumbents and NGOs as challengers – and their resources. Focus of the fourth chapter is on the Rana Plaza disaster and the subsequent push by NGOs for the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. As part of their advocacy campaign, the coalition of NGOs applied innovative action in the forms of information politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. In chapter five, an evaluation of the impact of NGOs – both on companies and on the field in general – will be given. Finally, in the sixth chapter, a conclusion on the research question is provided.

2. Analytical Framework

2.1. Introduction

In this second chapter, the analytical framework and design and methodology of the research will be discussed in more detail. The analytical framework will focus on three parts: (1) the strategic action field, (2) the exogenous shocks that give way to innovative action and the corresponding tactics of NGOs, and (3) the impact by NGOs. In each of these part, a combination is made between the work of Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam on field theory and the work of Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink on transnational advocacy networks. Before moving on to the discussion of the three parts and the subsequent research design and methodology, the works of Fligstein and McAdam and Keck and Sikkink will be introduced briefly.

With *A Theory of Fields*¹³ and the earlier published *Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields*¹⁴, Fligstein and McAdam aim to offer a general theory that can be used to explain “the underlying structure of, and sources of change and stability in, institutional life in modern society.”¹⁵ The authors introduce the concept of strategic action fields and develop a comprehensive theory of its characteristics and dynamics. In this effort, Fligstein and McAdam have built upon the knowledge produced in the areas of economic sociology, organisational theory, historical institutionalism, and social movement studies.¹⁶

Keck and Sikkink, in their work *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*¹⁷, point out the role transnational advocacy networks have played in promoting social change in the areas of human rights, the environment, and women’s rights.¹⁸ Their objective is to offer an understanding of these kinds of alliances, “making it possible to situate them within the rapidly changing configuration of world politics.”¹⁹

The combination of the work of Fligstein and McAdam and that of Keck and Sikkink is chosen to arrive at an analytical framework that can be used to give a general overview of the context and dynamics of the global garment industry, while at the same time giving suitable attention to the unique features of NGOs. In this way, the analytical framework enables the analysis of the research subject as a “case of embedded strategic action.”²⁰

This agrees with the views on agency the two sets of authors have. Both Fligstein and McAdam’s and Keck and Sikkink’s views correspond with Giddens’ notion of duality of structure and agency, which states that actors can act purposively, but are not entirely free to do so as they are still informed by the social structure in which they are placed. A continuous dialectic relationship exists, in which agency sustains or alters structure and structure informs agency.²¹ In field theory, structure is embodied by the strategic action field and the broader field environment, while agency is put forward as strategic action, or “how embedded social actors seek to fashion and maintain order in a given field”.²² Actors are bound by structure in the sense that the social order in which they find themselves enables and constrains possible courses of action. In a strategic action field, a set of shared understandings about the roles and rules in the field creates the actors’ repertoires of behaviours. Yet, at the same time, these structures are the outcomes of actions by individual and collective actors.²³ Fligstein and McAdam write:

¹³ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁷ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*.

¹⁸ Ibid., ix.

¹⁹ Ibid., x.

²⁰ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 183.

²¹ Demmers, *Theories of violent conflict : an introduction*, 119-120.

²² Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 3.

²³ Ibid., 4-7.

"... social life is largely played out in fields. (...) it is the structuring of those fields that determines which kinds of action make sense. The position we occupy in a field has a huge effect on how we enact our capacity for agency."²⁴

In *Activists beyond Borders*, Keck and Sikkink support the duality of structure and agency as well. The authors label transnational advocacy networks as structure. But the members of such networks have agency. Keck and Sikkink conclude: "Our approach to these transnational interactions must therefore be both structural and actor-centered."²⁵

In the subsequent paragraphs, the analytical framework is broken down into its three components. In each paragraph, the theoretical contributions of both Fligstein and McAdam and Keck and Sikkink will be discussed and combined. Hereafter, the research design and methodology will be explained.

2.2. The Strategic Action Field

A strategic action field (SAF) is a constructed social space in which actors interact and strive for control and power. SAFs are based on four general building blocks or categories of shared understandings. First, there is a set of actors that shares an understanding of what is going on or what is at stake in the field. Second, these actors vary in their possession of power which determines their position in the field and their relations to others. Third, there is a shared understanding about the social rules in the field, i.e. what tactics are possible and legitimate for each role. Finally, it is understood that no objective interpretative frame of the field exists, as all actors interpret the actions of others from their own perspective, reflecting their own social position in the field. Figuratively, SAFs can be seen as Russian dolls in the way that they interact in larger SAFs, but at the same time, are made up of smaller SAFs. Yet in contrast to such a Russian doll, the boundaries of a SAF are flexible and situation-dependent. Membership of a field is not based on objective criteria, but rather on subjective engagement with the subject of the field.²⁶

The actors active in a SAF can be divided into incumbents, challengers, and governance units, all of them with a certain amount of economic, political, and cultural resources at their disposal. Incumbents are the dominant actors within a field, exerting disproportionate influence. The organization of the SAF tends to reflect their interests and views. By contrast, challengers wield little influence within the SAF. Although they generally strive for an alternative ordering of the field, they may benefit from the stability of the prevailing order, and thus act in conformity to its rules. As long as a field is stable, they will prefer to maintain their current position, awaiting the political opportunities which accompany field crisis. Internal governance units are set up as facilitators of the field rules, enabling the smooth functioning of the system. As such, they are no neutral actors, but rather defenders of the dominant perspective. Their main occupations are field management, legitimising the rules of the field, and acting as a liaison between the SAF and external fields. Examples of internal governance units are trade organisations and accrediting bodies.²⁷

At this point in the theory of Fligstein and McAdam, Keck and Sikkink come into play, because transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and NGOs are excellent examples of challengers in a field. TANs bring together a range of actors who are committed to promote causes, principled ideas, and norms in specialized issue areas and NGOs often play a central role in these networks.²⁸ Keck and Sikkink describe TANs as typical challengers because their goal is to impose their idealistic world view upon others and to influence the behaviour of more powerful actors. However, they "are not powerful in a traditional sense of the word" and instead, they rely on framing and offering alternative collective identities.²⁹

²⁴ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 180.

²⁵ Ibid., 5.

²⁶ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 10-11.

²⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁸ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, 8-10. Although Keck and Sikkink specifically focus on TANs, their theory can almost equally be applied to NGOs. Except for quotes, from here on, NGOs will be the term primarily used.

²⁹ Ibid., 2, 16.

The success of challengers partly depends on their social skill, which all actors possess in a certain degree and which Fligstein and McAdam define as:

“the way in which individuals or collective actors possess a highly developed cognitive capacity for reading people and environments, framing lines of action, and mobilizing people in the service of broader conceptions of the world and of themselves.”³⁰

Social skill is thus used by actors to promote their control vis-à-vis other actors to, ultimately, construct their desired ordering of the SAF. To convince others and to produce collective action, actors need to utilise the cognitive, empathetic, and communicative dimensions of their social skill in their strategic interaction with others.³¹

SAFs have extensive ties with other fields, which with their own rules and power structure may both impose constraints and creates opportunities.³² In order to understand this broader environment and its relations with the SAF under scrutiny, Fligstein and McAdam offer three sets of distinctions, namely distant versus proximate, dependent versus interdependent or vertical versus horizontal, and state versus non-state. The first set concerns the availability or absence of ties between the SAF and other fields, and thus the capacity to influence each other. The second set defines the proximate field as either hierarchically and formally above or subordinate to the SAF (dependent or vertical) or defines the relationship as equal and mutually dependent (interdependent or horizontal). Finally, the distinction between state and non-state field seems rather evident. According to Fligstein and McAdam, state actors have a unique potential to impact the stability of non-state fields, due to their formal authority. However, as will be discussed in chapter 3, states may be dependent on the incumbents in a field as well.

SAFs can be found in various conditions. They can be either (1) unorganised or emergent, (2) organised and stable, or (3) organised, but unstable and open to transformation. Simply put, unorganised or emergent SAFs are social spaces in which a stable order that guides behaviour and relations still needs to be constructed. When actors reach shared understandings about what is at stake in the field, the distribution of power and positions, rules, and about the interpretative frames, the field becomes organised and stable.³³ As discussed above, the order in stable fields is oriented towards the interests of incumbents and is stabilised by internal governance units and the ties of the SAF with external fields. State actors generally support the status quo through certification, which “entails the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities.”³⁴ Although the structure of the SAF favours incumbents, challengers will generally not resort to open revolt. Instead, they may quietly await the right opportunities to challenge the system. This does not mean that the SAF is static. Both challengers and incumbents constantly engage in actions to preserve or improve their position. Challengers can do so by forming alliances with more powerful groups or by finding niches. Incumbents will try to co-opt, absorb, or undermine competitors. As Fligstein and McAdam put it: “The status quo should be viewed as an ongoing, negotiated accomplishment, threatened at all times by challenger resistance and exogenous change processes.”³⁵ Stable fields can become unstable when events create space for contention. The dynamics of unstable SAFs will be discussed in the following paragraph.

2.3. Exogenous shocks and the tactics of NGOs

The stability in a field can be disrupted through exogenous shocks or endogenous processes. External sources of instability may be the invasion by outside groups, changes in proximate fields, or macro-events which destabilise the entire state structure such as wars or economic depressions. Internally to the field, incremental changes have the potential to gradually undermine the shared

³⁰ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 17.

³¹ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 6-7.

³² Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, “Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields,” *Sociological Theory* 29 no. 1 (2011): 8; Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 18-19.

³³ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 86-89.

³⁴ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2001) in Fligstein and McAdam, “Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields,” 14.

³⁵ Fligstein and McAdam, “Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields,” 15; Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 96-99.

understandings supporting the field's ordering. The destabilising potential of these various shocks lies in their ability to interrupt the flow of resources which are essential to incumbent advantage, to undermine the legitimate ideas underlying the field, or to damage the ties incumbents have with key external allies such as the state.³⁶

Generally, incumbents possess sufficient material, cultural, and political resources to withstand such disturbances. For example, loyal governance allies may act to help incumbents out and to restore the status quo or challengers may, despite the destabilisation of the field, still be convinced of the power of incumbents and thus refrain from taking action. Yet, when the resources of incumbents fall short, contention may arise. This process is shaped by three key mechanisms. First, at least one actor should define the changes in the field or broader environment as a significant new threat or opportunity concerning his interests. Fligstein and McAdam label this the collective attribution of threat or opportunity. Second, there should be organizational appropriation, which implies that, in response to the threat or opportunity, the actor should devote resources to mobilise action. Last, actors should engage in innovative and previously inconceivable forms of collective action. As such, they violate the compliance to acceptable practices in order to obtain – or return to – their desired ordering of the field.³⁷ Although Fligstein and McAdam do not discuss the concept of innovative action in detail – despite mentioning the examples of boycotting and framing, Keck and Sikkink discuss four tactics used by TANS and NGOs which fit excellently in the concept of innovative action, because they concern the means with which the challenging actors try to transform the rules in the strategic action field. Keck and Sikkink distinguish between information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. It should be noted that these tactics can be applied simultaneously.

Information politics concerns “the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact.”³⁸ Serving as an alternative source of information is a way for NGOs to gain influence. In order to do this effectively, information must both be credible – through being reliable and well documented – and create attention – through being timely and dramatic. A crucial and often used tactic is the combination of facts and testimonies. Information can be supplied by local – generally Southern – organisations and often goes through high levels of mediation and translation in order to fit the receptivity of the – mostly Northern – target audience. Effective information politics needs to frame the case in question as the consequence of conscious human action or of negligence; it should identify responsible actors; and it should propose credible solutions. Strikingly said, information politics is “promoting change by reporting facts.”³⁹

With symbolic politics, actors “call upon symbols, actions, or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away.”⁴⁰ It involves the juxtaposition of different events and presenting them as a figurehead for underlying wrongs.⁴¹

In order to gain influence beyond their own reach, actors use leverage politics, i.e. “the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence”.⁴² Material leverage concerns the linking of issues with money or goods. For example, powerful actors such as states or intergovernmental organisation may threaten human rights-violating states with the cutting off of military or economic aid. Moral leverage involves “naming and shaming” of targets and, in that way, jeopardizing its credits.⁴³

Finally, accountability politics involves “the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles.”⁴⁴ Actors will elicit a public statement on an issue by the target organisation.

³⁶ Fligstein and McAdam, “Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields,” 15-17; Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 99-104.

³⁷ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 21.

³⁸ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

Subsequently, such statements will be made into opportunities by exposing the distance between discourse and practices, encouraging the target organisation to take steps to improve its behaviour.⁴⁵

It should be noted that when, according to Fligstein and McAdam, challengers continue to adhere to the socially constructed rules in their response to a recognized threat or opportunity, i.e. when they engage in traditional action instead of innovative action, no crisis or episode of contention is likely to develop.⁴⁶ However, when contention appears and is sustained, an episode of contention, i.e. "a period of emergent, sustained contentious interaction between . . . [field] actors utilizing new and innovative forms of action vis-à-vis one another" arises.⁴⁷ These episodes of contention are accompanied by a shared sense of uncertainty or crisis about the rules and power relations in the field. They can be ended by a settlement between the influential actors in the field.

2.4. Settlement and influence

Both Fligstein and McAdam and Keck and Sikkink offer a framework to respectively evaluate the settlement of contention or the achieved impact. Although the authors' points of departure differ, their works can be fitted together with some effort. As we will see, this results in an encompassing framework in which the two theories complement each other. The two approaches shall be discussed on their own, before combining them properly.

According to Fligstein and McAdam, episodes of contention can result into different possible settlements. Initially, incumbents will hold on to their routines or they may call upon the state to restore their supremacy. When this does not prove to be adequate, multiple alternative courses of action are possible. First, incumbents can team up with other incumbents to debase challengers or they can grant some concessions to one or more challengers to undermine the possibility of a large-scale attack. As such, the field changes, but does not transform significantly. Second, external actors may intervene successfully and restore the status quo. This probably results in at least some change in the underlying structure of the field. Third, the rules and power structure of the field can change fundamentally. If challengers recognize the changing situation and the political opportunities that accompany this, they may create a larger collective identity with other actors and reorganise the field based on new shared understandings. In order to be successful, these new understandings will have to (1) deliver valued resources to the participant groups, (2) be premised on what exists and how goods are already delivered, and (3) remove the onerous burdens imposed by the old conception of control. Finally, if challengers fail to deliver such a frame, the field may become nothing more than an unorganised social space. Actors, then, may choose to exit the field and migrate to other fields, or to subdivide the field into multiple fields.⁴⁸

With a different approach, Keck and Sikkink offer a framework to assess the influence of NGOs on their specific targets. To do so, they introduce multiple stages of influence. The first stage of influence is that of issue creation and agenda setting. In this stage, issues that received traditionally no attention now become subject to media attention, public debates, and meetings. Second, NGOs can create influence on the discursive positions of target actors, enforcing them to publicly support the cause and change their policy positions. NGOs will pressure actors to make binding commitments, for example by signing conventions or codes of conducts. Third, influence can be gained on institutional procedures of target actors, which may lead to greater transparency and participation by external actors. Fourth, networks may succeed in effectuating policy change in target actors. It should be noted that this does not necessarily leads to changes in the situation on the ground as enforcement may fail short. Finally, networks can gain influence on the actual behaviour of target actors.⁴⁹

The framework of Fligstein and McAdam may act as a critical lens concerning the optimism that could be presupposed from the theory of Keck and Sikkink. Although each achieved stage of influence can be seen as a success, agenda setting or even behaviour change of specific targets does not

⁴⁵ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, 24-25.

⁴⁶ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 20-21.

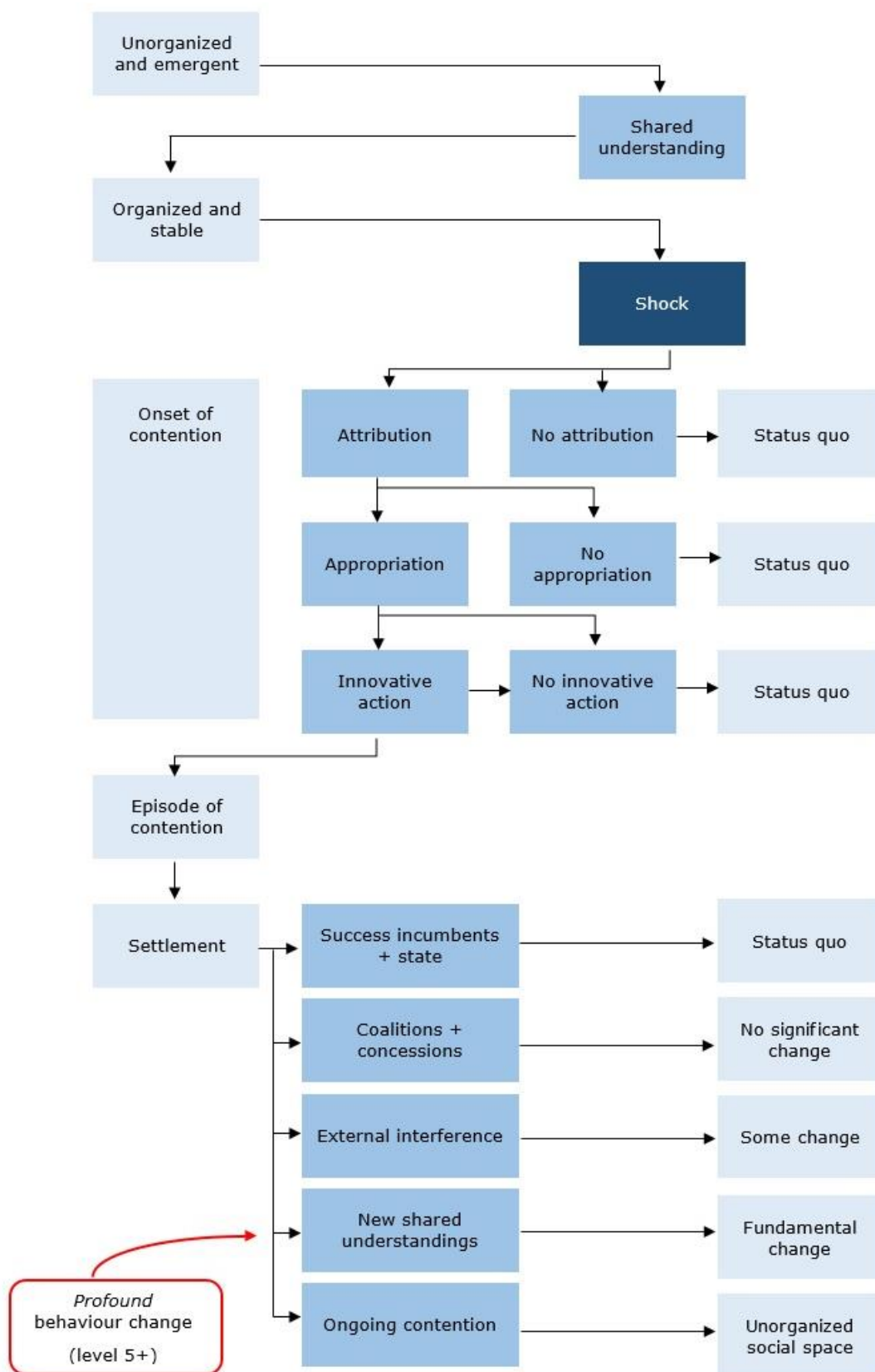
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁸ Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 15-19.

⁴⁹ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, 25-26.

necessarily equal the achievement of an alternative, idealistic social order, or even influence on the field as a whole. At the same time, with their emphasises on the settlement of the contention and the consequences for the organisation of the SAF, Fligstein and McAdam almost seem to neglect the small successes challengers can achieve. When the authors state that incumbents can grant some concessions, they seem to hint at the co-option of challengers, i.e. incumbents undermining challengers by offering them bread and circuses. However, in the long run, these concessions may add up as incremental changes that undermine the shared understandings in the field. Instead of seeing these concessions as a final settlement, Keck and Sikkink look at them as a transitional stage on the way towards a new social order. However, the two approaches also share an important similarity. The fundamental change of the strategic action field, i.e. the successful implementation of new shared understanding, corresponds with a *profound* change in the behaviour of the target actors. Hence, by combining these different approaches, a new, broader but reserved framework is composed.

Figure 1. Strategic action fields over time⁵⁰



⁵⁰ Based on: Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* and Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*.

2.5. Conclusion

The general field theory of Fligstein and McAdam and the more focused theory on TANs and NGOs by Keck and Sikkink together offer a new analytical framework suited to the context of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety. Guided by this framework, this thesis will use the concept of the strategic action field in order to map the global garment industry. The three key mechanisms distinguished by Fligstein and McAdam – collective attribution of threat or opportunity, organisational appropriation, and innovative action – and the four tactics distinguished by Keck and Sikkink – information politics, leverage politics, symbolic politics, and accountability politics – will be applied to the Rana Plaza disaster and the subsequent campaign by a coalition of NGOs. Finally, the impact of the Accord on targeted incumbents will be evaluated on the basis of the five stages of influence – ranging from issue creation and agenda setting to behaviour change, while the impact of the Accord on the strategic action field as a whole will be assessed on the basis of Fligstein and McAdam's various forms of settlement – ranging from no change at all to fundamental field change by the imposition of new shared understandings.

3. The strategic action field of the global garment industry

3.1. Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, the garment industry has developed into a complex, globalised social space. This chapter will discuss the characteristics of the field during field stability, thus preceding the Rana Plaza disaster of 2013. Since the field is flexible, situation-dependent, and based on subjective engagement, it may be unfeasible to discuss the global garment industry in all its facets. Yet, this need not be a stumbling block, since the aim is to provide a general overview of the context and dynamics of the field at most.

This chapter will point at the economic and globalised nature of the field, which has resulted in a complex interplay between transnational companies, producing countries, workers, labour unions, NGOs, and others. First, the core characteristics of the field will be discussed. The following paragraph will focus on the actors in the field, with special attention to transnational companies as incumbents and international NGOs as challengers and the resources they have at their disposal. This paragraph also covers the field's internal governance units. Because the focus of this thesis is mostly on the actors in the garment industry and the Accord, the broader field environment will not be discussed. In addition, since the Accord on Fire and Building Safety as discussed in chapters 4 and 5, is connected to Bangladesh in particular, extra attention will be given to the Bangladeshi garment industry.

3.2. The global garment industry

The global garment industry concerns the production of clothes. The term is often used to denote both the clothing industry and the overarching industry. In this thesis, the term garment industry will be used solely to denote the production of clothing which is one of the main pillars of the overarching industry that concerns the entire supply chain from the sourcing of raw materials such as cotton, wool, and synthetic fibres to the distribution and marketing of end products like jeans, sweaters, and coats.⁵¹ The industry has received much attention from human rights organisations over the past years, with one of the "hot topics" being the appalling working conditions in clothing factories in countries such as Bangladesh and Cambodia.⁵²

It is no surprise that the SAF of the global garment industry is foremost an economic field. In 2012, global clothing exports equalled a value of US\$ 421,554 million.⁵³ Major actors, which will be discussed in more detail further below, are dependent on the financial flows involved with the industries. Global clothing companies owe their existence to the profits they can make. For countries such as Bangladesh and Cambodia, clothing exports accounted for approximately 79 and 55 per cent of merchandised exports respectively.⁵⁴ The garment industry also provides much needed employment. In Bangladesh, 3,6 million workers were employed in the garment industry in 2010. At that time, this equalled five per cent of the total workforce, tantamount to 29% of the industrial workforce. The number is still increasing, as today, the sector employs 4 million workers.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Hildegunn Kyvik Nordås, *The Global Textile and Clothing Industry post the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing* (World Trade Organization, 2004), 3; Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 17.

⁵² See for example: "Our Work," ILRF, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.laborrights.org/our-work>.

⁵³ "International Trade and Market Access Data," WTO, accessed January 10, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/statis_bis_e.htm?solution=WTO&path=/Dashboards/MAPS&file=Map.wcdf&bookmarkState={%22impl%22:%22client%22,%22params%22:{%22langParam%22:%22en%22}}.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ This information is obtained through the composition of data from the BGMEA and the World Bank. Unfortunately, recent data regarding the size of the total workforce is not available. "Trade information," BGMEA, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/TradeInformation>; "World Development Indicators-database Bangladesh," World Bank, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=BGD>; "Jobs-database," World Bank, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=jobs&Type=TABLE&preview=on>.

The garment industry is also a highly globalised field. This is made possible by some of the key characteristics of the industry, such as the low costs of market entry because of the product of clothing being labour-intensive but low-technology, the ease of transportation, and favourable regulations which encourage the outsourcing of production.⁵⁶ Globalisation was facilitated by the IMF and World Bank who promoted neoliberal programmes and encouraged developing countries to open up their markets and to adjust their economies towards export-oriented production. In the case of Bangladesh, several measures were introduced in the mid-1970s, but trade liberalisation mostly took off from the mid-1980s onwards.⁵⁷ Just before this period, in 1974, the Multifibre Arrangement (MFA) was enacted. In order to protect the domestic industries of developed countries, the MFA allowed "selective quantitative restrictions."⁵⁸ In practice, this meant that the United States, Canada, and Europe were allowed to restrict imports from specific developing countries. The MFA also regulated the increase in exports from developing countries in general, which was set at a maximum of six per cent a year. Since growth was being limited, instead of an industry concentrated in a few countries, it spread out to many. Although the MFA ended in 1994 and was replaced by the Agreement on Textile and Clothing, which had to lead to the removing of the quotas, it laid the foundation for today's fragmentation of the garment industry.⁵⁹

The globalisation of the industry was, and still is, also encouraged by domestic conditions in developing countries. Wages are substantially lower than in North America and Europe. According to The Guardian, garment workers in Bangladesh receive the lowest wages in the world; a minimum of 5,300 take, about \$ 54, a month.⁶⁰ Also social legislation, or rather the enforcement of social legislation, is considerably less developed than in North America and Europe. Despite all the members of the International Labour Organization (ILO) being obliged to respect, promote, and realise principles such as freedom of association, in practice this does not seem to be complied with.⁶¹ In the case of Bangladesh, the Labour Act of 2006 should "[ensure] that workers and employers, without distinction whatsoever, shall have the right to establish and join the union of their choice subject to the constitution of the respective association."⁶² Yet, Freedom House reports that union leaders still face dismissal or intimidation, including physical attacks.⁶³ The severe assault on a female union president, who was beaten with an iron rod in 2014, illustrates the gap between legislation and reality.⁶⁴

Next to cheap production, fast delivery has become one of the building blocks of the industry structure. Large retailers and branded marketers⁶⁵, or transnational corporations (TNCs), have rationalised their supply chain management according to the principles of "lean retailing" or "quick

⁵⁶ Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 14; Naila Kabeer and Simeen Mahmud, "Rags, Riches and Women Workers: Export-oriented Garment Manufacturing in Bangladesh," in *Chains of Fortune: Linking Women Producers and Workers with Global Markets*, ed. Commonwealth Secretariat (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004), 133.

⁵⁷ Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Neoliberal economic reforms, the rich and the poor in Bangladesh," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 34 no. 1 (2004): 44.

⁵⁸ "Textiles Monitoring Body," WTO, accessed January 10, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/texti_e/textintro_e.htm.

⁵⁹ Kabeer and Mahmud, "Rags, Riches and Women Workers," 135-137; Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 20-21; "Textiles Monitoring Body," WTO, accessed January 10, 2017, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/texti_e/textintro_e.htm.

⁶⁰ Michael Safi, "Police and fear stalk the streets of Dhaka as clothes workers fight for more than £54 a month," *The Guardian*, January 8, 2017, accessed January 11, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/08/bangladesh-garment-workers-factories-industrial-action>.

⁶¹ ILO, *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-Up* (2010), accessed January 11, 2017, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_467653.pdf.

⁶² Bangladesh Employers' Federation, *A Handbook on The Bangladesh Labour Act* (2009), 14, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/353/A%20Handbook%20on%20the%20Bangladesh%20Labour%20Act%202006.pdf>.

⁶³ "Bangladesh 2016," Freedom House, accessed January 11, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/bangladesh/>.

⁶⁴ Steven Greenhouse, "Attacks on Union Leaders at Bangladesh Factories," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2014.

⁶⁵ Branded marketers are companies that have increasingly outsourced all aspects of the production process. Instead they focus solely on marketing. Examples of such branded marketers are Nike and Reebok.

response". This comes down to limiting inventories, enabling the "multi-season retailing strategy", i.e. the putting on the market of new collections constantly, as opposed to the traditional seasonal collections. These developments require producers to be flexible and quick, which TNCs can enforce because of their sheer size. One of the consequences of this system has been the increasing role of middlemen who act as intermediaries between retailers and producers, and subsequently, the loss of knowledge on behalf of the TNCs concerning where their products are actually produced.⁶⁶

In short, the field can thus be characterised by its economic and global nature, a desire for cheap and fast delivery, and subsequently, by poor working conditions. According to critics, this implies that one of the shared understandings in the field is *profits over people*. As the Dutch documentary *De Slag om de Klerewereld* (a language joke translating as *The Battle of the Clothes World* but also including a swear word to imply the poor working conditions) illustrates, everyone is welcomed to the industry, as long as money is brought along and no annoying questions are asked.⁶⁷

3.3. Actors in the field

Incumbents

The emphasis on economic means has rendered some actors to become very influential. The characteristics of the industry mentioned earlier, including the accessibility and fragmentation of production, label it as a buyer-driven commodity chain. In such chains, it is a shared understanding that large transnational companies (TNCs) have disproportioned power. According to Bartley, TNCs have become increasingly more dominant because of the power vacuum and decreasing state enforcement capabilities caused by globalisation.⁶⁸ Garwood argues that companies' sheer size and buying power generate an important power position.⁶⁹ This view is confirmed by Appelbaum, who states:

"One of the principal changes in global apparel commodity production has been the growing economic power of retailers based predominantly in developed countries. Large retailing firms exert a great deal of control over prices and sourcing locations, both through the price pressures they can exert on the independent labels they carry and through their growing volume of private-label production (now estimated to encompass as much as one third of all US retail apparel sales)."⁷⁰

According to Gereffi, in buyer-driven commodity chains:

"The companies that develop and sell brand-named products exert substantial control over how, when, and where manufacturing will take place, and how much profit accrues at each stage of the chain."⁷¹

Thus, it can be assumed that the organisation of the field reflects the interests and views of TNCs. They can be considered to be the most important incumbents in the industry.

During field stability, in 2011⁷², the largest public companies in the apparel industry were Wal-Mart Stores, Inditex, H&M, TJX Cos, and Gap. Because Wal-Mart Stores did not operate exclusively in the apparel sector, Inditex, H&M, and TJX Cos will be discussed in order to illustrate the economic,

⁶⁶ Ian M. Taplin, "Who is to blame?," *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 10 no. 1 (2014): 74-78; Nordås, *The Global Textile and Clothing Industry post the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing*, 1; Gary Gereffi, "The International Competitiveness of Asian Economies in the Apparel Commodity Chain" (working paper, Economics and Research Department, Asian Development Bank, 2002), 4.

⁶⁷ The *Slag om de Klerewereld* is a triptych initiated by Teun van de Keuken and Roland Duong and broadcasted by the VPRO. In the series, Teun van de Keuken assumes the role of merchant on the hunt for the most cost-efficient location to produce a sweatshirt. It can be watched at http://www.npo.nl/de-slag-om-de-klerewereld/POMS_S_VPRO_740241.

⁶⁸ Tim Bartley, "Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards: Struggles over Codes of Conduct in the Apparel Industry," *Research in Political Sociology* 14 (2005): 211-244.

⁶⁹ Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 19.

⁷⁰ Richard P. Appelbaum, "TNCs and the Removal of Textiles and Clothing Quotas" (working paper, United Nations Conference on Trade And Development, 2005), 7.

⁷¹ Gereffi, "The International Competitiveness of Asian Economies in the Apparel Commodity Chain," 4.

⁷² The most recent data before the Rana Plaza disaster, as provided by Forbes, is from 2011. For consistency, all data presented here will be from 2011.

political, and cultural resources of the incumbent parties. Inditex is a Spanish company, holding the brands Zara, Pull and Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home, and Uterqüe. In 2011, its sales equalled \$ 17,200 million. \$ 2,400 million of this was profit.⁷³ At the time, Inditex' founder, Amancio Ortega, ranked seven on "The World's Billionaires"-list of Forbes.⁷⁴ According to its own data, Inditex sourced from 1,398 suppliers located in over 40 countries. 45% of its suppliers were located in Asia and 33% in the European Union.⁷⁵

H&M is a Swedish company. Its brands include H&M, H&M Home, COS, Weekday, Cheap Monday, and & Other Stories. In 2011, the company achieved \$ 15,400 million in sales. It made a profit of \$ 2,700 million.⁷⁶ In the annual report of 2011, the company disclosed that it worked with around 700 suppliers, located primarily in Asia and Europe.⁷⁷ H&M also has disclosed its supplier factory list since March 2013, a month before the disaster. Unfortunately, the original data is no longer available as only the latest data is displayed.⁷⁸ Yet, H&M is said to be the largest apparel buying company from Bangladesh.⁷⁹ It can be assumed that this renders the company considerable power.

Finally, TJX Cos is an American apparel and home fashions retailer. Its "off-price" strategy means it offers brand name and designer merchandise for prices below regular prices.⁸⁰ In 2011, the company generated \$ 21,900 million in sales and a profit of \$ 1,300 million. Unfortunately, TJX does not offer information about the suppliers and countries it sources from.

Table 1. The 5 Biggest Public Companies in the apparel industry (2011)⁸¹

Company	Country	Sales (in million)	Profits (in million)	Assets (in million)	Market Value (in million)
Wal-Mart Stores	United States	\$ 421,800	\$ 16,400	\$ 180,700	\$ 187,300
Inditex	Spain	\$ 17,200	\$ 2,400	\$ 13,500	\$ 45,400
H&M	Sweden	\$ 15,400	\$ 2,700	\$ 8,300	\$ 53,400
TJX Cos	United States	\$ 21,900	\$ 1,300	\$ 8,000	\$ 19,700
Gap	United States	\$ 14,700	\$ 1,200	\$ 7,100	\$ 13,500

No indications of major political resources of TNCs are known by the author. In an interview with The Guardian, the chief executive of H&M has said to have personally visited the prime ministers of

⁷³ "Inditex," Forbes, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/companies/inditex/>; "The World's Biggest Public Companies 2011," Forbes, accessed January 22, 2017, http://www.forbes.com/lists/2012/18/global2000_2011.html.

⁷⁴ "The World's Billionaires 2011," Forbes, accessed February 22, 2017, http://www.forbes.com/lists/2011/10/billionaires_2011.html.

⁷⁵ "Annual Report 2011," Inditex, accessed February 22, 2017, https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/18789/Grupo_INDITEX_Annual-Report-Inditex-2011.pdf/1d9158ad-dcbe-4ee7-b11e-6be2284e7645.

⁷⁶ "H&M," Forbes, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/companies/hm/>; "The World's Biggest Public Companies 2011," Forbes.

⁷⁷ "Annual Report 2011," H&M, accessed February 22, 2017, https://about.hm.com/content/dam/hmgroupp/groupsite/documents/en/Annual%20Report/Annual_Report_2011_P1_en.pdf.

⁷⁸ ILRF, Twitter post, March 21, 2013, 12:38 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/314823247378145280>.

⁷⁹ Jason Burke, Saad Hammadi, and Simon Neville, "Fashion chains sign deal for worker safety," *The Guardian*, May 14, 2013.

⁸⁰ "TJX Cos," Forbes, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/companies/tjx-cos/>; "What is "Off-Price" Retailing?," TJX, accessed January 12, 2017, https://www.tjx.com/career/careers_off_price.html.

⁸¹ Data generated from: "The World's Biggest Public Companies 2011."

Bangladesh and Cambodia on several occasions. Furthermore, governments are said to be feared by the idea of losing business to competing countries, reducing their independency from TNCs.⁸² So, it seems that the economic importance of TNCs for developing countries such as Bangladesh may influence political decision making, but this claim cannot be sufficiently supported.

TNCs also possess a certain degree of cultural resources. In the Western world, their practices are highly intertwined with a prevailing culture of consumerism, or – in the case of the garment industry – fast fashion. Consumers are accustomed to getting what they want, when they want it and especially the young are influenced by brand image, trends, and price.⁸³ Providing cheap fashionable items is the core business strategy of TNCs such as Inditex and H&M. Both are top leaders in the culture of fast fashion and it is estimated that clothes bought at Zara, one of Inditex' brands, are worn no more than seven times.⁸⁴ These cultural resources manifest itself when such TNCs face severe criticism. Despite negative disclosures about abuses in the supply chains of certain companies, consumers turn a blind eye and continue buying their products, i.e. supporting these companies, simply because they like them.⁸⁵

Challengers

The ordering of the field also causes certain actors to have no, or very little, power. In the global garment industry, workers and labour unions are the prime example of actors without power.⁸⁶ This group will briefly be discussed before moving on to a set of actors that actively challenge the incumbents in the field: international advocacy NGOs in the anti-sweatshop network. Although focus is on the global garment industry as a whole, occasionally Bangladesh shall be put forward as example.

Garment workers generally do not have any significant economic, political, or cultural resources. Most of the time, they are from the poorer classes of the society and lack education.⁸⁷ The majority are rural migrants. Employers are said to refrain from offering contracts, to dismiss workers without any notice, and to deny them benefits to which they are legally entitled. Furthermore, workers are in a weak position due to a surplus of cheap labour in many garment producing countries. Despite of this, working in the garment industry is also considered to be an attractive option, as the wages, deplorable as they might be, are often higher than at alternative jobs.⁸⁸ Politically, garment workers have little capacity as well. Especially in Bangladesh, politicians frequently have close relationships with the business community and some are businessman themselves. Corruption and clientelism are dominant in all political parties and all levels of society.⁸⁹ As will be discussed in chapter 4, corruption also contributed to the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in 2013. Permission for the building was not given by the designated authority, but by the mayor of Savar, a political ally of the owner of the building, a local politician himself.⁹⁰ In addition, labour unions are notorious weak or do not exist at all. This makes it more difficult for workers to enforce their rights or to make their voices heard. In Bangladesh, unions are registered in only about 10 per cent of the garment factories despite

⁸² Jo Cofino, "CEO of H&M: reducing consumption will create a social catastrophe," *The Guardian*, February 3, 2015.

⁸³ Taplin, "Who is to blame?," 78; Catrin Joergens, "Ethical fashion: myth or future trend?," *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal* 10 no. 3 (2006): 370.

⁸⁴ Taplin, "Who is to blame?," 78; P. Ghemawat and J.L. Nueno, *Zara: Fast Fashion* (Harvard Business School Case 9-703-497 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2006) in Taplin, "Who is to blame?"

⁸⁵ Joergens, "Ethical fashion: myth or future trend?," 369.

⁸⁶ Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 43;

Angela Hale and Linda M. Shaw, "Women Workers and the Promise of Ethical Trade in the Globalised Garment Industry: A Serious Beginning?," (working paper, Antipode, 2001); César A. Rodríguez-Garavito, "Global Governance and Labor Rights: Codes of Conduct and Anti-Sweatshop Struggles in Global Apparel Factories in Mexico and Guatemala," *Politics&Society* 33 no. 2 (2005): 203-233.

⁸⁷ Kabeer and Mahmud, "Rags, Riches and Women Workers," 148; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2016 – Bangladesh Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016), 15.

⁸⁸ Kabeer and Mahmud, "Rags, Riches and Women Workers," 145-150;

⁸⁹ Nuruzzaman, "Neoliberal economic reforms, the rich and the poor in Bangladesh," 40; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2016 – Bangladesh Country Report*, 10-12.

⁹⁰ Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, Jason Burke, and Simon Neville, "Rescuers save 40 from collapsed garment factory, but hopes fade for hundreds more," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2013; *The Financial Express*, "Counting dollars at the expense of workers," April 26, 2013.

amendments made to the labour law in 2013 in order to simplify the establishment of labour unions.⁹¹ China has only one officially recognized labour union, which is criticized for its ineffectiveness.⁹² In Cambodia, labour unions lack sufficient resources to be successful and some are even headed by allies of the government.⁹³ Union leaders and workers encounter dismissals, intimidations, and violence.⁹⁴ Finally, culturally, garment workers lack a strong position as well. The large majority of the workers is female and discrimination is no exception.⁹⁵

As said, other challengers in the field are international advocacy NGOs in the anti-sweatshop network. With headquarters in the United States, Canada, and Europe, these organisations enjoy substantially more freedom and resources than workers. Still, according to Garwood, most of these NGOs are rather small, having annual revenues of less than \$ 2 million and fewer than ten employees. One of her interviewees exercises the term “smoke and mirrors” to refer to the NGOs’ activities as projecting an image of a large, well-resourced organisation.⁹⁶ To illustrate the economic, political, and cultural resources of international advocacy NGOs, the Dutch chapter of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC or SKC, consisting of the Dutch team and the International Office), the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF), the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), and the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) will be discussed. These NGOs are also the research subjects of chapter 4.

Economically, all of the NGOs under scrutiny are highly dependent on grants. As seen in Table 2, in 2012, revenues ranged from \$ 520,231 (MSN) to \$ 1,916,639 (ILRF). CCC, ILRF, and MSN depended for almost all of their revenues on grants and donations, either from foundations, their domestic governments or the European Union, or individuals. The system used by WRC, in which affiliated colleges and universities pay the organisation an annual fee, renders it an unique status. The organisation extracted just 47% of its revenues from grants. As “smoke and mirrors” are pulled away, it becomes clear that all four NGOs rely on a very small staff. CCC, ILRF, and WRC employ between eleven and fifteen people each, although volunteers support the organisations occasionally.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2016 — Bangladesh Country Report*, 8; Human Rights Watch, *Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers’ Rights in Bangladesh’s Garment Factories* (Human Rights Watch, 2015), 30.

⁹² “China 2016,” Freedom House, accessed January 13, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/china>.

⁹³ “Cambodia 2016,” Freedom House, accessed January 13, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/cambodia>; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2016 — Cambodia Country Report*, 14.

⁹⁴ “Bangladesh 2016,” Freedom House; “Cambodia 2016,” Freedom House; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2016 — Cambodia Country Report*, 14.

⁹⁵ Kabeer and Mahmud, “Rags, Riches and Women Workers,” 134-137.

⁹⁶ Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 43.

⁹⁷ “Jaarverslag 2015,” SKC/CCC, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://schonekieren.nl/over-ons/over-ons/beleid/jaarstukken/jaarverslag-2015/view>; “Annual Report 2015,” ILRF, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/2015%20Annual%20Report%20Online.pdf>; “Financial Statement 2013,” MSN, accessed January 13, 2017, http://en.archive.maquilasolidarity.org/MSN_Finances; “2007 2008 Report to Affiliate Universities and Colleges,” WRC, accessed January 13, 2017, http://www.workersrights.org/linkeddcs/WRCReportToAffiliates_20072008.pdf.

Table 2. Financial overview international advocacy NGOs (2012)⁹⁸

Organisation	Country	Revenues	Expenses
CCC⁹⁹	Netherlands	\$ 1,111,239	\$ 1,076,953
ILRF	United States	\$ 1,916,639	\$ 1,843,024
MSN	Canada	\$ 520,231	\$ 475,361
WRC (2007¹⁰⁰)	United States	\$ 1,311,074	\$1,324,872.00

Overall, the NGOs do not have real political resources, although their ideological agenda may provide them with some political affiliations. Best endowed is the ILRF, with one of its board members being congresswomen Jan Schakowsky, member of the U.S. House of Representatives. In this occupation, she is the chair of the International Workers Rights Caucus.¹⁰¹ The other organisations seem to lack any significant political ties, although the CCC has had contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, resulting in a sustainable trade mission to Bangladesh by the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in 2013.¹⁰² Furthermore, funding and legislation might have restricted political activities. In the United States, legislation prohibits NGOs to perform certain political activities and lobbying government officials is strictly regulated. In the Netherlands, such legislation is less extensive.¹⁰³

Culturally, the agendas of these NGOs fit into the Western tradition of promoting human rights. The emphasis on “human rights at work and in the community” (CCC), “dignity and justice for workers” (ILRF), “labour and women’s rights” (MSN), and “the right of workers” (WRC) reflects the principles set forth in the Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation (Declaration of Philadelphia) – which was adopted by the members of the ILO in 1944 – and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights – which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nation in 1966.¹⁰⁴ For example, the Declaration of Philadelphia notes that the ILO should support nations in achieving “policies in regard to wages and earnings, hours and other conditions of work calculated to ensure a just share of the fruits of progress to all, and a minimum living wage to all employed and in need of such protection.”¹⁰⁵ The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights is more direct. Article 7 states that all workers are entitled to fair wages, a decent living, safe and healthy working conditions, equal opportunities,

⁹⁸ “Jaarverslag 2012,” SKC/CCC, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://schonekieren.nl/over-ons/over-ons/beleid/jaarstukken/jaarverslag-2012/view>; “2012 2013 Bi-Annual Report,” ILRF, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/ILRF%20Bi-Annual%20Report%202012-2013.pdf>; “Financial Statement 2012,” MSN, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://en.archive.maquilasolidarity.org/node/1227>; “2007 2008 Report to Affiliate Universities and Colleges,” WRC.

⁹⁹ Original financial data is provided in euros. In 2012, revenues equalled € 1,044,054 and expenses equalled € 1,011,841. Exchange rate of January 14, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Most recent data is from 2007.

¹⁰¹ 2012 2013 Bi-Annual Report,” ILRF; “Full biography,” Jan Schakowsky, accessed January 14, 2017, <https://schakowsky.house.gov/full-biography/>.

¹⁰² “Jaarverslag 2012,” SKC/CCC.

¹⁰³ Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*, 89.

¹⁰⁴ “What we believe in,” CCC, accessed January 19, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/about/principles>; “About,” ILRF, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.laborrights.org/about>; “About Us,” MSN, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.maquilasolidarity.org/en/aboutus>; “Mission,” WRC, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.workersrights.org/about/>; “ILO Constitution,” ILO, accessed January 19, 2017, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2453907:NO#declaration; “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” OHCHR, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>.

¹⁰⁵ “Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation,” article III, ILO, accessed January 19, 2017, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2453907:NO#declaration.

and a reasonable limitation of working hours, while article 8 guarantees “the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice.”¹⁰⁶

NGOs obviate their lacking economic and political resources by combining their ideological agenda with their main weapon: their ability to exploit companies’ vulnerabilities – namely their “brand image” – through the mobilisation of consumers.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in order to strengthen their position, all four NGOs are part of the TAN on the garment industry, consisting of over 200 organisations and unions.¹⁰⁸

Internal governance units

The strategic action field is stabilized and reproduced with the help of internal governance units. In the case of the global garment industry, this role is not fulfilled by labour unions – who mainly act as liaison between workers and factory owners, but are not aimed at TNCs – but foremost by compliance monitoring programmes, certification authorities and Codes of Conduct. These bodies and measures arose as a result of successful campaigns by NGOs after large scandals in the 1990s.¹⁰⁹

Codes of Conduct are standards to evaluate the performance of contractors. They are voluntary created by companies and range from very vague to very specific. Over time, most Codes of Conducts have been aligned with the ILO core standards and principles. Codes of Conducts are often put into practice through internal compliance monitoring, which is the monitoring and rating of subcontractors by companies’ own staff. Before the field rupture of 2013, which will be discussed in the following chapter, internal compliance monitoring has been used by Gap, Levi’s, Disney, Walmart, and H&M, amongst others. The system has been criticised for its lack of independency and transparency. In response to this critique, external monitoring and certification has been set up. American initiatives such as the Fair Labor Association (FLA), the Social Accountability International (SAI), and the Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (WRAP) and their European counterparts, the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and the Fear Wear Foundation (FWF) all monitor and certify factories of their members. Large differences can be found among the initiatives, but in many cases the auditors are paid directly by the brands or factories.¹¹⁰

Although third-party monitoring seems to have positive effects on compliance with labour standards, a lack of transparency makes it difficult to evaluate the effects properly.¹¹¹ Yet, it can be concluded that as internal governance units, such programmes facilitate the field rules by confirming the hegemony of TNCs, because they discourage government regulation. According to Bartley:

“... companies and their advisors sometimes especially argued that voluntary policies should be seen as a replacement for government regulation and could be an effective shield from a variety of political pressures.”¹¹²

Furthermore, it is argued that these programmes are mainly utilised for promotional purposes; counterbalancing public pressures. In this manner, they legitimise the rules of the field and defend the dominant perspective.¹¹³

3.4. Conclusion

The global garment industry should be understood as a strategic action field; a constructed social space in which actors interact and strive for control and power. During stability it was characterised by an economic and global focus. In 2012, global clothing exports equalled a value of US\$ 421,554 million and many actors have been dependent of the cash flows in the industry: transnational

¹⁰⁶ “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” OHCHR, accessed January 19, 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>.

¹⁰⁷ Bartley, “Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards; Garwood, *Advocacy Across Borders*.

¹⁰⁸ “Who we are,” CCC, accessed January 13, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/about/who-we-are>.

¹⁰⁹ Bartley, “Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards.

¹¹⁰ Dara O’Rourke, “Outsourcing Regulation: Analyzing Nongovernmental Systems of Labor Standards and Monitoring,” *The Policy Studies Journal* 31, no. 1 (2003): 6-16.

¹¹¹ O’Rourke, “Outsourcing Regulation,” 20-21.

¹¹² Bartley, “Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards,” 218.

¹¹³ Bartley, “Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards,” 224.

companies because of their existential need for profits, garment producing countries because of their state revenues, and their citizens because of the employment the industry generates. In Bangladesh, the industry employed 3,6 million people in 2010, almost one third of the country's industrial workforce. The global nature and the fragmentation of the field has been the result of protectionist measures by developed countries – such as the Multifibre Arrangement of 1974 – and trade liberalisations implemented in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. Consequently, the industry spread out to many different countries, weakening the bargaining power of the producing states. This globalisation was, and still is, encouraged by domestic conditions in developing countries. Wages are substantially lower and the enforcement of social legislation is considerably less developed than in North America and Europe. In Bangladesh, workers receive the lowest wages in the world; about \$ 54, a month. In addition, workers are deterred from setting up or joining labour unions. Union leaders frequently face dismissal or intimidation, including physical attacks. Due to companies' desire for cheap products and fast delivery, orders are often subcontracted. As a result, the companies often do not know where their products are actually produced, let alone under which conditions. Yet, overall, the field seems to function under the shared understanding of "profits over people."

The important actors in the field can be divided into incumbents, challengers, and internal governance units. Incumbents are the dominant actors within a field, exerting disproportionate influence. The organisation of the field tends to reflect their interests and views. In the case of the global garment industry – which can be labelled as a buyer-driven commodity chain – this group consists of transnational garment companies, such as Inditex, H&M, and TJX Cos. These companies have ample economic resources. For example, in 2011, H&M had a sales value of \$ 15,400 million. Moreover, these companies' practices are highly intertwined with a prevailing culture of consumerism, or fast fashion. These cultural resources manifest itself when such companies face severe criticism, but consumers turn a blind eye and continue to buy their products.

Challengers generally strive for an alternative ordering of the field, but wield little influence. This group includes the coalition of NGOs. They have few economic resources. Annual revenues are generally less than \$ 2 million and consist mostly of grants. Moreover, the organisations have often fewer than ten employees. Due to this, they resort to a strategy of "smoke and mirrors" which with they try to project an image of a large, well-resourced organisation. Culturally, the agendas of these NGOs fit into the Western tradition of promoting human rights. NGOs obviate the lack of other resources by combining their ideological agenda with their main weapon: their ability to exploit companies' dependency on their "brand image" through the mobilisation of consumers.

Internal governance units are set up as facilitators of the field rules, defending the dominant perspective. In the global garment industry, compliance monitoring programmes, certification authorities and Codes of Conduct fulfil this role. These bodies and measures are meant to guide and evaluate the performance of contractors. However, it is claimed that these units are mainly utilised for promotional purposes and as legitimisation of the field rules.

Most important aspects of the analysis are the characteristics of the field – its economic and global focus, but moreover, the poor working conditions supported by the shared understanding of "profit over people." In response to the Rana Plaza disaster of April 2013, the coalition of NGOs started a vigorous campaign to effectuate an alternative nature of the field.

4. The Rana Plaza-disaster and the tactics of NGOs

4.1. Introduction

On Wednesday morning, April 24, 2013, a multi-storey building in Dhaka came crashing down. The collapse would kill more than thousand garment workers, appalling the world and drawing attention to the structural wrongs regarding the fire and building safety conditions in the garment industry. At the same time, the disaster would strengthen NGOs in the anti-sweatshop network in their determination to bring about change, leading eventually to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. This chapter will discuss the shock of the Rana Plaza disaster, followed by the main body of this thesis; an analysis of the tactics employed by NGOs in their endeavour to reach a binding agreement with global apparel companies to improve the fire and building safety conditions in Bangladesh. The disaster proved to be a “game changer” and the coalition of the Clean Clothes Campaign, International Labor Rights Forum, Maquila Solidarity Network, and the Worker Rights Consortium seized upon the momentum with a vigorous advocacy campaign. By creating consumer awareness and targeting companies, the coalition of NGOs intensively applied information politics and leverage politics to force companies to sign the Accord. To enforce implementation, the Accord would foresee independent auditing and public disclosure of the findings hereof, which was fervently used by the NGOs to hold companies that signed the Accord accountable. With the help of labour unions, the ILO, and other external parties, the Rana Plaza would eventually be signed by over 200 companies.

4.2. The Rana Plaza disaster and its immediate aftermath

On Wednesday, April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza building collapsed. The building in Savar, in the outskirts of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, housed multiple garment factories and other stores. The final death toll would add up to 1,138.¹¹⁴ The disaster was not the first of its kind in Bangladesh. In previous years, the country had seen multiple collapses and fires of garment factories. In 2005, the collapse of a garment factory caused 64 deaths. In 2010, a fire killed 21 workers and ten months later, another fire led to the death of at least 28 workers. In 2011, two workers were killed in an explosion in a factory in Dhaka. Later on in that year, a fire in the Tazreen Fashions factory resulted in the death of 112 workers.¹¹⁵ However, the magnitude of the Rana Plaza disaster was unprecedented. The death toll of more than 1,100 people caused it to be the deadliest accident in the garment industry up to date.¹¹⁶ According to NGOs in the anti-sweatshop network, these preventable disasters can be seen as symptoms of a rotten system in which profits are prioritised over people.¹¹⁷

On the day prior to the Rana Plaza collapse, around noon, large cracks appeared in the walls of the building. After visiting, officials from the government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) declared the building risky and it was evacuated subsequently. Yet, their suggestion to allow investigation of the building by an external engineer was turned down by the owner of the building, Shohel Rana. Instead, his own staff declared the building safe, concluding the cracks to be just superficial damage of the plaster. Production managers and workers were ordered to resume work the next day, even though other businesses located in the building, such as the bank located at the third floor, remained closed. On Wednesday morning, garment workers initially refused to enter the building. They gave in after intimidations and threats to not get

¹¹⁴ Hammadi, Burke, and Smithers, “Factory collapse kills garment workers;” Sarah Butler, “Factory owners’ legal threat on safety deal.”

¹¹⁵ “The story of the Bangladesh Accord, so far. An interactive timeline,” CCC, accessed January 24, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/ua/2013/accord>.

¹¹⁶ Siegle, “Fashion still doesn’t give a damn about the deaths of garment workers;” Robin Pagnamenta, “Eight die in new fire as clothes factory death toll rises.”

¹¹⁷ See for example: “Safety in the garment industry,” CCC, accessed February 27, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/safety>; “Health and Safety,” ILRF, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.laborrights.org/issues/health-safety>.

Table 3. Timeline

May 11, 2005	Collapse of the Spectrum Garment factory
February 25, 2010	A fire at the Garib factory kills 21 workers
February 28, 2010	The coalition of NGOs, international unions federations, and other human rights organisations join to work on a set of proposals to improve safety in Bangladesh
April, 2010	Release of the Health and Safety Action Points for Buyers
December 14, 2010	That's it Sportswear factory fire
April, 2011	Meeting between Bangladeshi and international unions and NGOs, international brands and retailers, the BGMEA, and the Bangladeshi government to discuss a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that would establish a program of work aimed to prevent future tragedies
December 3, 2011	Explosion at the Eurotex Ltd. factory
March 15, 2012	First brand (PVH Corp.) signature on MoU on building safety in Bangladesh
October, 2012	Gap announced that it would rely on a self-regulatory approach
September 14, 2012	Second brand (Tchibo) signs MoU on building safety
November 24, 2012	Tazreen Fashions fire, 112 workers die
December, 2012	Presentation of the proposal by Wal-Mart, Tesco, Carrefour and Migros
January 26, 2013	Smart Export fire kills seven more people
February 22, 2013	IndustriALL Multi-stakeholder meeting in Dhaka
March 25, 2013	The tripartite National Action Plan (NAP) is developed by the BGMEA, trade unions and the Government of Bangladesh
April 15, 2013	European brands agree to compensate Tazreen victims
April 24, 2013	Rana Plaza Building collapse
April 29, 2013	Brands, trade unions, the ILO, labour rights groups, ETI and the GIZ meet, deadline set for May 15 for a Bangladesh safety plan
May 5, 2013	New proposal issued, called the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh
May 8, 2013	8 killed in fire in Tung Hai garment factory in Dhaka
May 10, 2013	Support for the Accord surpasses the one million
May 13, 2013	H&M and Inditex announce signature under the Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord
May 14, 2013	International Labour Organisation (ILO) supports the Accord
May 15, 2013	31 global retail Brands sign the Accord by the 15 of May deadline
May 23, 2013	The Accord formally signed
May 31, 2013	Walmart and GAP agree not to join the Bangladesh Accord
July 10, 2013	Walmart and Gap present the Alliance
January 15, 2014	Bangladesh Accord announces establishment of factory safety inspection standards
March 10, 2014	First factory inspections completed

paid or even to be fired. Less than an hour later, after the diesel generators at the top of the building were switched on in response to a power outage, the building collapsed.¹¹⁸

"I sewed about five T-shirts, then the power went out. I heard the generators start up with a roar and suddenly the whole building started to shake. Plaster fell from the ceiling. People started screaming."

*Nazma Akhtar as interviewed
by The Guardian, May 18, 2013*

In the aftermath of the disaster, more details about the building, which was completed in 2007, came to light. First, the foundation was composed of inferior materials. According to *The Financial Express*, the excavation was "filled in with sands, saw dust and loose soils almost overnight."¹¹⁹ Second, the owner never obtained the necessary permits from the Rajuk, the designated authority for construction safety in Dhaka. Instead, the office of the local municipality granted permission, although it was not authorised to do so. It is claimed that the chairman of the local municipality was a political ally of Shohel Rana, who himself was a local politician and member of the ruling Awami League.¹²⁰ Finally, the building was supposed to consist of five storeys, but three were illegally added later on.¹²¹ Such practices seem to be the rule rather than the exception, as building regulations are generally not enforced and effective institutions to do so are not in place.¹²² Despite these structural shortcomings, factories located in the building had been designated as safe by the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) and the Western company Primark.¹²³

After the collapse, "who to blame?" became an important question. Initially, in Bangladesh, the public opinion primarily turned against Shohel Rana and the building authorities. For example, the BGMEA president Atikul Islam demanded exemplarily punishment of the responsible parties, "either the factory owners or the building authorities" and Nazma Akter, president of the Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation said that the collapse of the Rana Plaza building "was due to the negligence of building and factory owners and they are responsible for the deaths."¹²⁴ Citizens and government officials both called for the punishment of the guilty. Through violent protests, garment workers demanded the capital punishment of those responsible and the Bangladeshi Home Minister,

¹¹⁸ *The Financial Express*, "Savar building collapse a man-made disaster," April 28, 2013; Hammadi, Burke, and Smithers, "Factory collapse kills garment workers;" Jason Burke, "Engineers warn 60% of garment industry buildings in Bangladesh at risk of collapse," *The Guardian*, June 4, 2013; *The Financial Express*, "The Economist terms it outcome of corrupt workplace practices," April 28, 2013.

¹¹⁹ *The Financial Express*, "Counting dollars at the expense of workers."

¹²⁰ *The Financial Express*, "Counting dollars at the expense of workers ;" Al-Mahmood, Burke and Neville, "Rescuers save 40 from collapsed garment factory, but hopes fade for hundreds more."

¹²¹ It should be noted that different sources mention different numbers of storeys.

The Guardian and *The Times* both mention eight storeys, of which three illegal. The Bangladeshi *Financial Express* speaks of nine storeys, of which three illegally added. Sources: *The Financial Express*, "Counting dollars at the expense of workers ;" Al-Mahmood, Burke and Neville, "Rescuers save 40 from collapsed garment factory, but hopes fade for hundreds more ;" Syed Zain Al-Mahmood and Luke Harding, "Garment factory death toll rises as owner is arrested while trying to flee to India," *The Guardian*, April 29, 2013; Robin Pagnamenta, "124 die as factory collapses," *The Times*, April 25, 2013.

¹²² *The Financial Express*, "Savar tragedy triggers outcry worldwide," April 26, 2013; Robin Pagnamenta, "Primark passed factory in Dhaka as safe," *The Times*, April 26, 2013; *The Financial Express*, "Things go haywire with national building code," April 27, 2013.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *The Financial Express*, "Savar tragedy set to create adverse impact on RMG, fear industry leaders," April 26, 2013.

Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir, declared that "the culprits would be punished."¹²⁵ Within a few days, the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, ordered the arrest of the factory owners and Rana, who had disappeared but was apprehended near the border with India on the 28th.¹²⁶

Yet, over time, critique shifted towards global companies. In May 2013, the BGMEA, along with factory owners, argued that disasters in the garment industry were partly caused by negligence by top buyers, such as H&M and Walmart.¹²⁷ In an interview with CNN, the Bangladeshi prime minister said that global buyers should ensure that their purchase prices are sufficient to cover good wages and safety investments. Referring to the contribution of companies to the Rana Plaza disaster, she said: "They're partly responsible for it."¹²⁸ This change of position is remarkable. It may be that domestic actors shifted accountability to TNCs in imitation of the public discourse in the Western world and as a way to evade accountability themselves. Unfortunately, it is unfeasible to research this claim in this thesis.

Global apparel buyers also participated in the "blame game." They either distanced themselves from the disaster, claiming they were not involved with the factories in the building, or they accused the government and industry officials of negligence. On April 29, representatives of over forty companies, including H&M, Inditex, Gap, and Primark, met with the BGMEA and expressed their concerns. The regional director of JC Penny demanded credible action from the government, stating that buyers were rethinking their sourcing from Bangladesh. More explicit, the vice president of Li and Fung, a trading and logistics business, said: "It is the government's duty to make the buildings safe."¹²⁹

According to Lucy Siegle, the Guardian's expert of ethnical living, this is no surprise:

"Perhaps the most pernicious of all - I paraphrase - is: "We don't own the factories so we can't help what happens in them." This is usually followed by devolving responsibility to the host government. It is technically true: but let's not pretend this is a regret. Over two decades the big retailers and brands (not just those caught producing in Rana Plaza) have systematically distanced themselves from the manufacture of their product. It is part of their business model."

In garment buying countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, emphasis was placed both on the responsibility of companies and on that of the Bangladeshi government. Immediately after the collapse, Western newspapers listed well-known companies involved with the factories in the building, such as Primark, Mango, and Walmart.¹³⁰ As will be discussed extensively in paragraph 4.3, TNCs were also actively pilloried by NGOs in the anti-sweatshop network. Western governments reacted to the disaster with condolences and criticism towards the Bangladeshi government. The European Union's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, and Commissioner for Trade, Karel De Gucht, stated they were "both deeply saddened by the terrible loss of life." At the same time, they called upon the Bangladeshi authorities to increase their efforts to ensure factory safety, explicitly mentioning the illegal nature of the Rana Plaza building. According to their press release, the European Union was "considering appropriate action, including through the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) – through which Bangladesh currently receives duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market"¹³¹ Suspension of GSP

¹²⁵ *The Financial Express*, "Workers lay siege to hq of BGMEA, block roads," April 26, 2013; *The Financial Express*, "BGMEA forms 3 bodies over Savar tragedy," April 25, 2013; Pagnamenta, "124 die as factory collapses."

¹²⁶ *The Financial Express*, "Savar building collapse death toll rises to 305, 72 rescued alive Friday;" Syed Zain Al-Mahmood and Jason Burke, "More survivors found in collapsed Dhaka factory," *The Guardian*, April 27, 2013; *The Financial Express*, "Rana arrested from Benapole," April 29, 2013; Al-Mahmood and Harding, "Garment factory death toll rises as owner is arrested while trying to flee to India."

¹²⁷ *The Financial Express*, "Top buyers least focused on working conditions," May 4, 2013.

¹²⁸ *The Financial Express*, "BD reforming its garment industry, PM tells CNN," May 4, 2013.

¹²⁹ Al-Mahmood, Burke and Neville, "Rescuers save 40 from collapsed garment factory, but hopes fade for hundreds more ;" *The Financial Express*, "Buyers demand coordinated efforts to ensure RMG units' safety," April 30, 2013.

¹³⁰ Hammadi, Burke, and Smithers, "Factory collapse kills garment workers;" Julfikar Ali Manik and Jim Yardley, "Building Collapse in Bangladesh Kills Scores of Garment Workers," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2013.

¹³¹ "Joint Statement by HR/VP Catherine Ashton and EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht following the recent building collapse in Bangladesh," European Commission, last modified April 30, 2013, <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=894>.

privileges was also announced by the president of the United States, Barack Obama. In a letter to Congress, the president said this measure was taken because Bangladesh was “not taking steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights to workers in that country.”¹³² Constraining GSP benefits would harm Bangladesh’s trading position, possibly leading to the loss of state revenues and jobs. Yet, according to The New York Times, “The damage Bangladesh's other industries will face from the suspension is expected to pressure the country's garment industry to make many of the changes Washington wants.”¹³³

However, one of the most important aspects of the Rana Plaza disaster is that it undermined the legitimate ideas underlying the field. On top of the earlier disasters, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building and the unprecedented number of victims seems to have made clear the structural wrongs in the garment industry and subsequently created an opportunity to fight the “blame game.” International NGOs eagerly used this momentum to advocate for drastic improvements in the supply chains of the industry.

4.3. Tactics of NGOs

Already in 2010, in response to the Garib Garib Sweater Factory fire, international NGOs and other members of the anti-sweatshop network started working on a set of proposals to improve fire and building safety in the garment industry. The resulting *Health and Safety Action Points for Buyers* – codified by the coalition of the NGOs: The Clean Clothes Campaign, the International Labor Rights Forum, the Maquila Solidarity Network, and the Worker Rights Consortium – led to several meetings between international and Bangladeshi unions and TNCs, including H&M, Inditex, Primark, and Walmart. Over time, Bangladeshi industry and government officials and other INGOs joined the meetings as well. Efforts by the International Textile, Garment, and Leatherworkers Federation (ITGLWF, now part of the global union IndustriALL) and the coalition of NGOs eventually resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). PVH Corporation, which owns brands such as Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and the German retailer Tchibo signed the MoU in 2012 after which it was renamed the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement (BFBSA). However, the Agreement would only be implemented if signed by at least four major buyers and despite efforts by the parties involved, this never happened. For example, Gap Inc., which was closely involved in the drafting of the final text of the MoU, ultimately preferred a self-regulatory approach.¹³⁴

The fire at the Tazreen Fashion factory in late 2012 made way for two other initiatives. The Bangladeshi government, BGMEA, and Bangladeshi labour unions developed the National Action Plan (NAP) which aimed to review the national safety standards, improve inspection capacities, and provide for fire safety trainings for garment employees and a fire safety hotline. In addition, buyers Wal-Mart, Tesco, Carrefour, and Migros presented a proposal that called for a collective approach to fire and building safety and the development of a program that would be coordinated by the German development agency GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit). Amongst others, the proposal would accommodate better regulation and enforcement, investments, and more engagement of workers. In response to this initiative, IndustriALL and the coalition of NGOs set up a meeting to discuss the combination of the proposal with the principals set out in the BFBSA. Five days before this meeting would take place, the Rana Plaza building collapsed.¹³⁵

For the NGOs, the Rana Plaza disaster offered an opportunity to pressurise companies to increase their efforts for more fire and building safety. The Ethical Trading Initiative qualified the disaster as “a wake-up call,” others called it a “game changer.”¹³⁶ In response to the collapse, the coalition of NGOs and the global union federations IndustriALL and UNI Global Union intensified their

¹³² Steven Greenhouse, “U.S. to Suspend Trade Privileges With Bangladesh,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2013.

¹³³ Greenhouse, “U.S. to Suspend Trade Privileges With Bangladesh.”

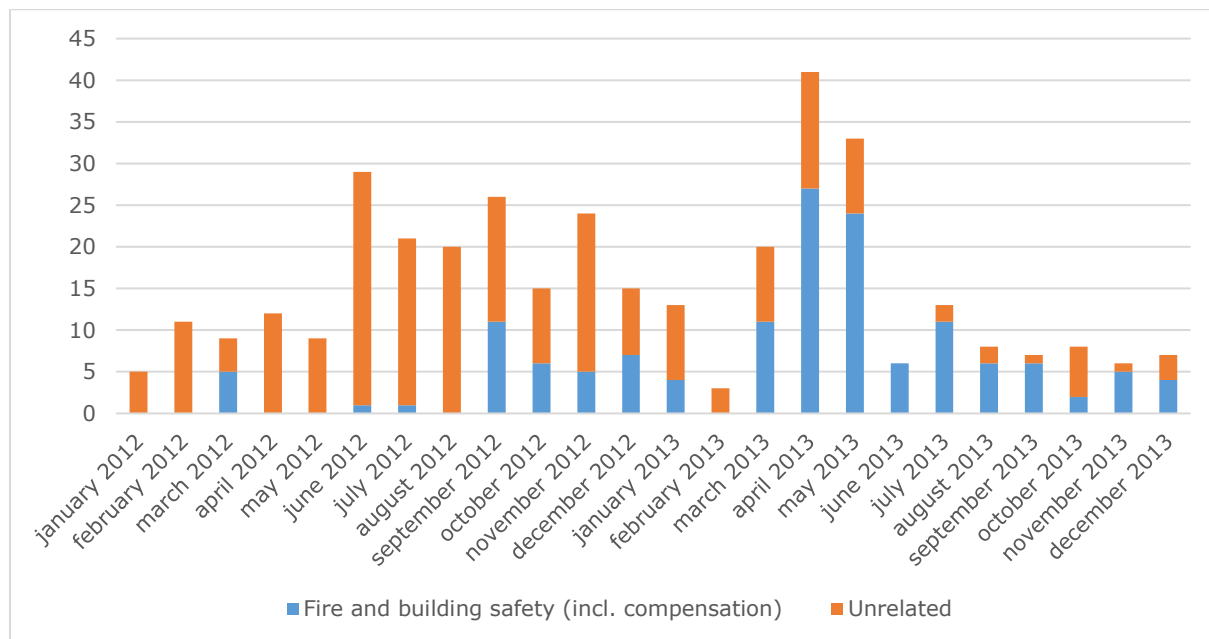
¹³⁴ CCC and MSN, “The History behind the Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord,” Last modified July 8, 2013, <https://cleanclothes.org/resources/background/history-bangladesh-safety-accord>; Juliane Reinecke and Jimmy Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza: Building coalitional power for labour rights between unions and (consumption-based) social movement organisations,” *Organization* 22, no. 5 (2015): 730.

¹³⁵ CCC and MSN, “The History behind the Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord.”

¹³⁶ Al-Mahmood, Burke and Neville, “Rescuers save 40 from collapsed garment factory, but hopes fade for hundreds more ;” Reinecke and Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza.”

cooperation. The unions started negotiations with garment companies, as they could rely on previously established relationships with many of the companies and were seen as more appropriate partners than the NGOs. The coalition of NGOs immediately launched a vigorous advocacy campaign, using their expertise on the global garment industry and their ability to mobilise consumers.¹³⁷ Although no specific data on the devotion of money, manpower, or other resources has been acquired, it seems safe to assume the NGOs paid considerable attention to this campaign as public communication on the subject increased to unprecedented levels. As example, Figure 2 illustrates the increase of messages by the CCC on the social media platform Twitter related to the fire and building safety in Bangladesh.

Figure 2. Tweets by the CCC¹³⁸



The advocacy campaign of the coalition of NGOs was mainly based on two tactics: serving as a source of information and targeting companies. Various communication tools were deployed. Social media was the tool of choice to share short messages about the disaster. Overall, this format was mainly used to quickly inform and shock followers and to frame companies as the responsible parties. The information shared either came from the organisations themselves – especially the WRC engaged in local ‘fact finding’,¹³⁹ other NGOs such as Human Rights Watch,¹⁴⁰ and reliable regular media including The New York Times and The Independent.¹⁴¹ Information was shared about topics such as the death toll, the structural problems with building safety in Bangladesh, and the quest of global companies for the lowest costs. Companies were also mentioned by name and explicitly labelled as perpetrators. Already on the day of the collapse, the WRC discovered the labels of Primark and Mango at the site of the disaster. This information was subsequently passed on to the other organisations in the network which shared it on their websites and social media pages such as Twitter.¹⁴² Over the

¹³⁷ See for example: “Clean Clothes Campaign Twitter,” CCC, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes>; “Labor Rights Forum Twitter,” ILRF, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://twitter.com/ILRF>; “MSN mourns the victims of Bangladesh factory collapse, calls on brands to take action,” MSN, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://en.archive.mauquilasolidarity.org/node/1122>; Manik and Yardley, “Building Collapse in Bangladesh Kills Scores of Garment Workers.”

¹³⁸ Graph made by the author. Data collected from: “Clean Clothes Campaign Twitter,” CCC.

¹³⁹ Reinecke and Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza,” CCC, Twitter post, April 24, 2013, 7.13 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/327062832493510657>.

¹⁴⁰ See for example: ILRF, Twitter post, April 25, 2013, 4.26 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/327564404042383362>.

¹⁴¹ See for example: ILRF, Twitter post, April 26, 2013, 6.13 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/327772333043511296>; CCC, Twitter post, April 25, 2013, 1.44 p.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/327523487742849024>.

¹⁴² Reinecke and Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza,” CCC, Twitter post, April 24, 2013, 7.13 a.m.

Clean Clothes Campaign

The Clean Clothes Campaign is one of the most prominent organisations in the anti-sweatshop network. According to its homepage, CCC's main focus is on "improving working conditions in the global garment industry."

Founded in 1989 in the Netherlands, the organisation has grown considerably over time. At this moment, it consists of 17 local chapters, all of which are networks of NGOs and unions in itself.

The CCC relies on four main strategies. It pressurises companies through consumer campaigns, it provides support in concrete cases of labour and human rights violations (so called *urgent appeals*), it raises public awareness about working conditions in the garment industry and mobilises consumers, and it uses legal mechanisms and lobbies for legislation to protect workers' rights and hold companies accountable.

International Labor Rights Forum

The ILRF advocates for workers' rights globally. Its mission is to achieve "dignity and justice for workers worldwide."

The American organisation was founded in the early 1986 to monitor the enforcement of recently adopted legislation which linked the granting of U.S. trade and investment benefits to a country's respect for labour rights.

The ILRF operates across various sectors, such as the industries of cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, apparel in Bangladesh, cotton in Uzbekistan, and bananas in Latin America. Its key strategies are: driving corporate accountability, leveraging government procurement, promoting just trade policies and legislation, and empowering workers.

Maquila Solidarity Network

The MSN "supports the efforts of workers in global supply chains to win improved wages and working conditions and greater respect for their rights."

The organisation was founded in Canada in 1994 and initially concentrated on the pressuring of and engaging with major brands and retailers. In 2014, MSN discontinued their campaigning and public awareness activities and shifted its focus to supporting local women's and labour rights organisations in Central America and Mexico.

Worker Rights Consortium

The WRC is an independent labour rights monitoring organisation. It investigates the working conditions in factories producing university-related apparel. Its purpose is "to combat sweatshops and protect the rights of workers who make apparel and other products."

The WRC was founded in 2000 by university administrators, students, and international labour rights experts to assist universities with the enforcement of the labour rights of workers producing apparel and other goods bearing the universities' names and logo.

The organisation independently investigates factories around the world and maintains an online database with its findings. Furthermore, the WRC works with local NGOs to train workers and to inform them about their rights.

¹⁴³ Clean Clothes Campaign, <https://cleanclothes.org/>; International Labor Rights Forum, <http://www.laborrights.org/>; Maquila Solidarity Network, <http://www.maquilasolidarity.org/>; Maquila Solidarity Network Archive, <http://en.archive.maquilasolidarity.org/>; Worker Rights Consortium, <http://www.workersrights.org/>. All accessed January 30, 2017.

course of the campaign, Twitter would be used frequently to call on companies particularly and as a group. Tweets, for example, addressed “Western companies,” “major retailers,” and “apparel brands & retailers,”¹⁴⁴ but also Benetton, H&M, Walmart, and GAP.¹⁴⁵ Especially the ILRF actively used social media. During the first week after the disaster, it tweeted forty messages, all related to the collapse.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the actual reach of these messages, because social media platforms do not offer this data. Yet, the *Internet Archive: Wayback Machine* shows ILRF had 2,308 followers on Twitter in September 2013.¹⁴⁷ According to the CCC’s annual report, almost 7,000 people followed the organisation via its social media pages by the end of 2012. By the end of 2013, this number had increased to more than 18,500.¹⁴⁸

“Labels Primark and Mango found after factory collapse Bangladesh [link to website]”

CCC, Twitter post, April 24, 2013, 7.13 a.m.

80+ Bangladeshi factory workers died today and brands STILL refuse to prevent these deaths. [link to blog]”

ILRF, Twitter post, April 24, 2013, 2.26 p.m.

¹⁴⁴ CCC, Twitter post, April 25, 2013, 1.48 p.m.,

<https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/327524638596947969>; CCC, Twitter post, April 26, 2013, 3.01 p.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/327905363510849537>; ILRF, Twitter post, May 7, 2013, 8.06 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/331968396524679168>.

¹⁴⁵ See for example: CCC, Twitter post, April 29, 2013, 2.15 a.m.,

<https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/328799786541150208>; ILRF, Twitter post, April 28, 2013, 1.05 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/328601007351287808>; CCC, Twitter post, May 15, 2013, 1.21 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/334584346667274240>.

¹⁴⁶ “Labor Rights Forum Twitter,” ILRF, accessed February 3, 2017,

https://twitter.com/ILRF?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor.

¹⁴⁷ “Twitter ILRF,” Internet Archive: Wayback Machine, accessed February 25, 2017,

https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://twitter.com/ilrf.

¹⁴⁸ “Annual report 2012,” CCC, accessed February 27, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/about/annual-reports/2012-annual-report/view>; “Annual report 2013,” CCC, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://schonekieren.nl/over-ons/over-ons/beleid/jaarstukken/jaarverslag-2013/view>.

The NGOs' own websites offered more space to discuss events in-depth. In press releases and other publications, the organisations combined information about the disaster with appeals to companies to improve fire and building safety and to compensate the victims of the Rana Plaza disaster. Through this combination, the disaster was presented as a result of the behaviour of companies and as preventable – if necessary steps had been taken. The first publications of the CCC, ILRF, and MSN after the collapse showed remarkable similarities, indicating the coordination of communication. All three organisations used a variation on the phrase “[we] are calling for immediate action from international brands” in the first or second paragraph of their press statement. Moreover, all of them continued with the targeting of companies. The CCC mentioned the European brands Mango, Primark, C&A, and KIK, and the American retailer Walmart, the ILRF named Walmart, and the MSN called on “Joe Fresh and other Canadian brands.” The final element present in all three statements was the critique on voluntary company led monitoring and the appeal to companies to sign the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement. In strong language, the hesitance of companies to allow independent and binding monitoring was depicted as contribution to the collapse. According to Judy Gearhart, executive director of the ILRF: “With a transparent agreement in place, such as the safety agreement, it would not have been so easy to disregard the warning signs and send workers back in to their death.”¹⁴⁹

*“The Clean Clothes Campaign, along with trade unions and labour rights organisations in Bangladesh and around the world is **calling for immediate action from international brands** following today's collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Savar, in Dhaka Bangladesh.”*

*“International Labor Rights Forum and other labor rights groups are **calling for immediate action from international corporations and brands.**”*

*“The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), along with trade unions and labour rights organisations in Bangladesh and around the world, is **calling for immediate action from international brands** following the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Savar, in Dhaka Bangladesh.”*

The NGOs also made appearances in regular media outlets such as newspapers. Although in general, not much space was offered to discuss their views, the organisations were presented as experts on the topic in well-known newspapers such as The Guardian, The New York Times, and the Toronto Star. These opportunities were used to emphasise the urgency for action and to identify companies as the responsible actors.¹⁵⁰ Scott Nova, executive director of WRC, was quoted in the New York Times:

“The front-line responsibility is the government's, but the real power lies with Western brands and retailers, beginning with the biggest players: Walmart, H & M, Inditex, Gap and others. (...) The price pressure these buyers put on factories undermines any prospect that factories will undertake the costly repairs and renovations that are necessary to make these buildings safe.”¹⁵¹

Next to social media, their own websites, and regular media, NGOs communicated through other channels. All over the United States, the ILRF, in cooperation with other human rights organisations, organised protests in front of Walmart and GAP stores as part of its “End Death Traps tour.”¹⁵² Petitions were published to “Tell brands to take responsibility and sign the Bangladesh Fire and

¹⁴⁹ “Labels Primark and Mango found after factory collapse Bangladesh,” CCC, accessed January 3, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2013/04/24/labels-primark-and-mango-found-after-factory-collapse-bangladesh>; “ILRF Urges US Brands and Retailers to Join Bangladesh Factory Safety Agreement,” ILRF, accessed January 3, 2017, <http://www.laborrights.org/releases/ilrf-urges-us-brands-and-retailers-join-bangladesh-factory-safety-agreement>; “MSN mourns the victims of Bangladesh factory collapse, calls on brands to take action,” MSN.

¹⁵⁰ See for example: Al-Mahmood, Burke and Neville, “Rescuers save 40 from collapsed garment factory, but hopes fade for hundreds more”

; Francine Kopun, “Loblaws to compensate garment workers' families,” *The Toronto Star*, April 30, 2013; Manik and Yardley, “Building Collapse in Bangladesh Kills Scores of Garment Workers.”

¹⁵¹ Manik and Yardley, “Building Collapse in Bangladesh Kills Scores of Garment Workers.”

¹⁵² ILRF, Twitter post, April 24, 2013, 11.31 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/327308908601430016>; ILRF, Twitter post, April 26, 2013, 6.16 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/327773279580471296>.

Building Safety Agreement!”¹⁵³ Coalitions of trade unions and NGOs sent open letters to companies, calling on them to take action.¹⁵⁴ Finally, NGOs and global unions had close contact with companies in order to persuade them to sign the Agreement.¹⁵⁵ More on the latter can be found in paragraph 4.4, in which the role of external actors will be discussed.

Figure 3. Photo of an End Death Traps protest organised by the ILRF¹⁵⁶



It should be noted that until May 5, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh was not mentioned, because it did not yet exist. As mentioned, in response to the proposal by Walmart and other companies, IndustriALL and the coalition of NGOs had scheduled a meeting for April 29 in order to discuss the combining of the BFBSA and the proposal presented by Wal-Mart, Tesco, Carrefour, and Migros. Despite – or maybe due to – the Rana Plaza disaster, this meeting took place and IndustriALL and the coalition of NGOs met with European and North American apparel companies, the ILO, and the Ethical Trading Initiative. The attending parties established a committee to draft a new, uniform agreement, which should be presented by May 5 and circulated for final approval by May 15. However, the committee proved unable to draft an agreement which was acceptable for all. Instead, IndustriALL, UNI Global Union, and the NGOs announced to present an adapted version of the BFBSA, now called the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. IndustriALL led numerous meetings with garment companies in order to negotiate the content of the Accord. Meanwhile, companies were asked to sign by May 15.¹⁵⁷

The presentation of the Accord did not substantially change the campaign. After May 5, NGOs used the terms “safety plan,” “agreement,” and “accord” interchangeable.¹⁵⁸ Yet, the CCC, ILRF, and MSN, together with ten other organisations in the anti-sweatshop network, launched new petitions, calling

¹⁵³ “Stop The Killing! Demand safety for Bangladeshi workers,” CCC, accessed February 3, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/action/current-actions/rana-plaza>.

¹⁵⁴ “23 Canadian Organizations call on Loblaw to take action to prevent more worker deaths,” MSN, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://en.archive.maquilasolidarity.org/node/1125>.

¹⁵⁵ “Jaarverslag 2013,” SKC, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://schonekleren.nl/over-ons/over-ons/beleid/jaarstukken/jaarverslag-2013>;

¹⁵⁶ “Terrorists? Arrest ‘Em (Unless They’re Walmart),” Labor Notes, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://www.labornotes.org/2013/04/Terrorists-Arrest-Em-Unless-Theyre-Walmart>.

¹⁵⁷ CCC and MSN, “The History behind the Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord;” Reinecke and Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza.”

¹⁵⁸ See for example: CCC, Twitter post, May 7, 2013, 3.53 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/331723488555565057>; CCC, Twitter post, May 13, 2013, 8.14 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/333963481273479169>; ILRF, Twitter post, May 13, 2013, 7.29 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/333952227528028160>; “World’s biggest fashion retailers agree to sign Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh,” MSN, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://en.archive.maquilasolidarity.org/node/1127>.

for companies to endorse the Accord. It was distinctly presented as a solution to the appalling security conditions in garment factories. In a press release from the CCC, Ineke Zeldenrust was quoted:

"We now call upon all major brands sourcing from Bangladesh to prevent any more deaths and sign this agreement before the deadline of the 15th. With 1,250 workers killed in the last six months in Bangladesh, it is now time for companies to move beyond vague promises, business-as-usual self-regulatory schemes and rhetoric, and to sign a binding safety agreement that can finally bring an end to the horror in Bangladesh."¹⁵⁹

By May 10, over one million people had expressed their support.¹⁶⁰ Another new initiative was the launch of the GAP Deathtrap website by the ILRF and United Students Against Sweatshops. The website, which was aimed at pressurising GAP to sign the Accord, contained information about the company's self-monitoring programme – and its assumed flaws – and it offered store manager letters, flyers, chants, and petitions to consumers and activists to use.¹⁶¹

In the final days before May 15, the NGOs' communication became more compelling. The CCC started a countdown, to once again call on companies to take action.

"Only 5 more days for brands to commit to safe factories! [link to Facebook page]"

CCC, Twitter post, May 10, 2013, 5.39 a.m.

"Final Countdown: 1d08h30min! #Garment This is not just about financial bottom line, it's about thinking ethically. No more business as usual"

CCC, Twitter post, May 14, 2013, 6.40 a.m.

"MANGO! Sign up to the #Bangladesh Safety Accord! Look what you did! 1d8hrs00min left to sign...WHO'S NEXT?!"

CCC, Twitter post, May 14, 2013, 7.00 a.m.

"Final countdown! 13h38min to go. Still missing: #Walmart & #Gap should not miss joining the band wagon! #garment pact"

CCC, Twitter post, May 15, 2013, 1.23 a.m.

Over the course of the campaign, TNCs that signed the Accord – first H&M and Inditex on May 13, followed two days later by Primark, C&A, PVH, Benetton, the Canadian Loblaw and others – were openly thanked by the NGOs at their websites and social media pages.¹⁶² Also in the New York Times, the contribution of H&M was publicly applauded. According to Scott Nova of the WRC:

¹⁵⁹ "CCC welcomes H&M and Inditex decision to sign legally binding Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh," CCC, accessed May 13, 2015, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2013/05/13/ccc-welcomes-h-m-and-inditex-decision-to-sign-legally-binding-accord-on-fire-and-building-safety-in-bangladesh>.

¹⁶⁰ "Global support for Bangladesh factory safety surpasses one million," CCC, accessed February 3, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2013/05/10/global-support-for-bangladesh-factory-safety-surpasses-one-million>.

¹⁶¹ "Gap Deathtraps Website Launched Following Bangladesh Tragedy," ILRF, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://www.laborrights.org/releases/gap-deathtraps-website-launched-following-bangladesh-tragedy>.

¹⁶² "Clean Clothes Campaign Twitter," CCC; "Labor Rights Forum Twitter," ILRF; "CCC welcomes H&M and Inditex decision to sign legally binding Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh," CCC; "World's biggest fashion retailers agree to sign Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh," MSN.

"H&M's decision to sign the accord is crucial. (...) 'They are the single largest producer of apparel in Bangladesh, ahead even of Walmart. This accord now has tremendous momentum.'"¹⁶³

By the deadline, more than thirty TNCs had signed, most of them European. Together, these companies sourced from over thousand Bangladeshi garment factories, 17% of all garment factories in the country.¹⁶⁴ Yet, as many large companies had not signed the Accord yet, the campaign continued. Especially the ILRF sustained targeting American companies through posting on their social media pages and organising petitions and protests.¹⁶⁵ The CCC shifted its attention to the need for victims of the collapse to receive financial relief, as it had done after the Tazreen fire in late 2012 as well.¹⁶⁶

"Brands signed for safety, now it's time to pay compensation for Tazreen and Rana Plaza victims. Sign our petition! [link to petition]"

CCC, Twitter post, May 24, 2013, 1.07 a.m.

"Today: 1 month after Rana Plaza. 6 months after Tazreen. Until full compensation is paid, no brand is off the hook. [link to petition]"

CCC, Twitter post, May 24, 2013, 01.19 a.m.

Thus, in the short-term after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, the coalition of NGOs applied information politics and moral leverage politics mostly. By evoking shock by consumers and by explicitly holding specific companies responsible for the disaster, the NGOs applied their traditional strategy: exploiting companies' dependency on their reputation by exposing human rights violations.

In the long run, the intensity of the campaign decreased but occasionally, the CCC and ILRF would remember consumers, activists, and companies of the need for effective action. In April 2014 and April 2015, at the anniversary of the disaster, the NGOs asked attention for the lack of compensation.¹⁶⁷ In September 2015, they published an evaluation of H&M's compliance with the Accord. Compliance with the Accord will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, but as the Accord ensured independent, public reporting, the coalition of NGOs used this to apply accountability politics. H&M was chosen because of its size, influence, and because of the considerable gap between the brand's discourse and its practices.¹⁶⁸ In response to the findings of the report, Scott Nova of the WRC concluded:

¹⁶³ Steven Greenhouse and Jim Yardley, "Global Retailers Join Safety Plan For Bangladesh," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2013.

¹⁶⁴ CCC, Twitter post, May 15, 2013, 4.14 p.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/334809131762462722>; "We made it! - Global Breakthrough as Retail Brands sign up to Bangladesh Factory Safety Deal," CCC; "Trade information," BGMEA.

¹⁶⁵ ILRF, Twitter post, May 21, 2013, 5.59 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/336828510280753152>; ILRF, Twitter post, May 21, 2013, 10.07 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/336891013182410752>; IRLF, Twitter post, May 21, 2013, 11.53, a.m., <https://twitter.com/ILRF/status/336917626603335680>.

¹⁶⁶ "Activists protest fashion brands' failure to pay Bangladesh disaster victims compensation," CCC, accessed February 27, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2013/05/24/activists-protest-fashion-brands-failure-to-pay-bangladesh-disaster-victims-compensation>.

"Bangladesh factory fire: brands accused of criminal negligence," CCC, accessed February 27, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2012/11/25/bangladesh-factory-fire-brands-accused-of-criminal-negligence>.

¹⁶⁷ "Clean Clothes Campaign Twitter," CCC.

¹⁶⁸ CCC, ILRF, MSN, and WRC, *Evaluation of H&M Compliance with Safety Action Plans for Strategic Suppliers in Bangladesh* (2015), accessed February 6, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/hm-bangladesh-september-2015.pdf>.

"In the face of worldwide revulsion over the Rana Plaza catastrophe and other garment factory disasters, H&M, the largest producer of garments in Bangladesh, promised to address hazardous conditions in its contract factories there. (...) It is now clear that H&M has broken this promise."¹⁶⁹

The evaluation was followed by a campaign involving accountability politics specifically targeted at H&M. Through social media and their websites, the CCC and ILRF called consumers to sign petitions and to send letters to the company.¹⁷⁰ In cooperation with another NGO in the anti-sweatshop network, the organisations launched the website www.hmbrokenpromises.com¹⁷¹ to bring together all initiatives and to mobilise consumers for demonstrations on the "Global Day of Action" on March 3, 2016, the day of the H&M shareholder meeting.¹⁷² As a result of the campaign, H&M received almost five thousand letters and demonstrations took place in over eleven countries.¹⁷³

Hey H&M, time to actually make factories safe. Garment workers need action, not fancy words! #ComeCleanHM @hm [link to own website]

CCC, Twitter post, October 1, 2015, 8.16 a.m.

Thank you all for your pressure on @hm! They are feeling it & their reaction is as mass-produced as their clothes..

CCC, Twitter post, February 8, 2016, 8.41 a.m.

¹⁶⁹ "H&M fails to make fire and building safety repairs in Bangladesh," CCC, accessed February 5, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2015/10/01/h-m-fails-to-make-fire-and-building-safety-repairs-in-bangladesh>.

¹⁷⁰ CCC, Twitter post, October 19, 2015, 3.02 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/656047774014705665>; "H&M: Make Factories Safe!," ILRF, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://laborrights.org/action-center/hm-make-factories-safe>.

¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, the website is no longer accessible.

¹⁷² "Labor Groups Demand H&M Deliver "Safety Conscious" Fashion," ILRF, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.laborrights.org/releases/labor-groups-demand-hm-deliver-safety-conscious-fashion>.

¹⁷³ "H&M: End Deathtraps - Make Factories Safe!," Action Network, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/hm-make-factories-safe>; CCC, Twitter post, May 4, 2016, 1.18 a.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/727774381007618048>.

Figure 4. Flyers handed out by activists protesting at H&M stores¹⁷⁴



4.4. External actors

External actors contributed to the trajectory of the episode to varying degrees. Most important was the involvement of the global union federations IndustriALL and UNI Global Union. Already from 2010, IndustriALL and the coalition of NGOs worked together on proposals to improve the fire and building safety in Bangladesh.¹⁷⁵ With regard to the Accord, the unions complemented the expertise and ability to mobilise consumers of the NGOs with institutional access to the ILO and companies. IndustriALL and UNI Global Union were “viewed by many of the brands as being legitimate ‘insiders’ to the employment relationship and regarded as more appropriate negotiation partners.”¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the global unions could rely on previously established relationships with many of the companies involved. Between April 29 and May 15, 2013, the unions’ General Secretaries frequently met with companies in order to negotiate the content of the Accord.¹⁷⁷ The cooperation of NGOs and global unions can be seen as crucial to the achievement of the Accord. Without the involvement of

¹⁷⁴ CCC, Twitter post, May 3, 2016, 5.52 a.m., <https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&vertical=default&q=from%3Acleanclothes%20since%3A2013-05-15%20until%3A2016-05-04&src=typd>.

¹⁷⁵ CCC and MSN, “The History behind the Bangladesh Fire and Safety Accord.”

¹⁷⁶ Reinecke and Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza.”

¹⁷⁷ Reinecke and Donaghey, “After Rana Plaza.”

the global unions, the NGOs could have pushed their offensive campaign too far, losing the opportunity for constructive negotiations. At the same time, without the NGOs' extensive knowledge about the garment industry and Bangladesh and their ability to pressurise companies, the Accord probably would have been much weaker or companies would have had more leeway to refuse cooperation.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, contributions to the campaign were made by online campaign groups, such as Avaaz, SumOfUs, and change.org, which organised and supported online petitions and e-mail actions. Although these organisations increased consumer awareness and pressure on companies, their actions could easily become counterproductive and cooperation seemed difficult.¹⁷⁹

Other external actors played supporting, but marginal roles. Many European and North American government officials publicly spoke out in favour of the Accord. According to an overview published by the CCC, responses ranged from supporting the Accord and urging companies to sign to investigations, donations, and public-private partnerships.¹⁸⁰ With regard to the Bangladeshi government, no such statements have been found,¹⁸¹ but after the Accord was enacted, the government coordinated efforts with officials and experts from the Accord in order to ensure a comprehensive and efficient nationwide inspection system.¹⁸²

Finally, the involvement of the ILO contributed to the achievement of the Accord considerably. The ILO was invited to act as independent chair of the Accord. As such, it offered support regarding the implementation and the coordination with national organisations and, more importantly, it rendered the Accord additional legitimacy. For at least one of the signatory companies, this involvement of the ILO served as a persuasive reason to sign the Accord.¹⁸³

4.5. Conclusion

The disaster concerns the collapse of the Rana Plaza building on Wednesday April 24, 2013. The building, which was located in Savar, in the outskirts of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, housed multiple garment factories and other stores. Eventually, over 1,100 people died in the disaster. The day before the attack, large cracks had appeared in the wall over the building. Although government and industry officials declared the building risky, the owner of the building decided to continue the production. On Wednesday morning, workers were intimidated to re-enter the building. After the diesel generators at the top of the building were switched on in response to a power outage, the building collapsed. The building had many defects. The foundation was substandard, no necessary permits from the local building authority were obtained, and several storeys were added illegally. After the collapse, this gave cause for a "blame game," in which industry officials, the Bangladeshi government, Western governments, and companies pointed to each other as responsible. International NGOs used this momentum to advocate for drastic improvements in the supply chains of the industry.

The coalition of NGOs had already worked together with the global union federations IndustriALL and UNI Global Union to draft proposals and agreements which should encourage improvements in the

¹⁷⁸ Reinecke and Donaghey, "After Rana Plaza."

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 729-733.

¹⁸⁰ For an overview, see: "FAQ 17 - Do governments support the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh?," CCC, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/issues/faq-safety-accord/#17---do-governments-support-the-accord-on-fire-and-building-safety-in-bangladesh->.

¹⁸¹ E.g. in newspapers and press releases

¹⁸² *The Financial Express*, "RMG stakeholders meet Sept 7," Augustus 24, 2013; *The Financial Express*, "Common standard for factory inspections set," November 17, 2013.

¹⁸³ "ILO welcomes accord on Building and Fire Safety in Bangladesh," ILO, accessed February 6, 2017, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_213295/lang-en/index.htm; Juliane Reinecke and Jimmy Donaghey, "The 'Accord for Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh' in Response to the Rana Plaza Disaster," in *Global Governance of Labor Rights: Assessing the Effectiveness of Transnational Public and Private Policy Initiatives*, ed. Axel Marx, Jan Wouters, Glenn Rayp, and Laura Beke (Edward Elgar, 2015), 257-277; Anne Posthuma and Arianna Rossi, "Coordinated governance in global value chains: supranational dynamics and the role of the International Labour Organization," *New Political Economy* 22, no. 2 (2017): 197.

fire and building safety conditions in garment factories. Just before the Rana Plaza disaster, they had scheduled a meeting with companies for April 29, 2013.

The Rana Plaza disaster was clearly recognised by the challengers as an opportunity, a “game changer” and it paved the way for a period of contention. In response, the coalition of NGOs and the global unions intensified their efforts. Because the unions could rely on previously established relationships with many of the companies and because they were seen as more appropriate partners than the NGOs, they performed the negotiations. The coalition of NGOs – with their expertise on the global garment industry and their ability to mobilise consumers – launched an advocacy campaign.

With this campaign, the NGOs applied information politics and moral leverage politics actively through social media, websites, newspaper articles, protests, petitions, etc. Information politics concerns the use of information; it involves framing the case in question as the consequence of conscious human action, identifying responsible actors, and proposing credible solutions. Moral leverage politics is the “naming of shaming” of targets in front of influential actors.

The coalition of NGOs immediately framed the Rana Plaza collapse as the result of companies’ desire for cheap products and fast delivery. Shocking information about the death toll and the structural problems with building safety in Bangladesh was alternated with accusations of specific companies. Already on the 24th, Worker Rights Consortium discovered the labels of Primark and Mango at the site of the disaster and this information was subsequently shared on the websites and social media pages of the other NGOs in the coalition. As the NGOs recognised the companies were highly dependent on their reputation, they attacked them in strong terms in front of their consumers. Subsequently, a legally-binding safety agreement was presented as a means to prevent disasters such as the Rana Plaza collapse. Yet, because the new, uniform agreement was initially still under negotiation, the Accord as such was not mentioned until May 5. It was presented by the global unions and the coalition of NGOs as an adapted version of their earlier Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Accord after a committee established at the meeting held on April 29 proved unable to draft an acceptable agreement. Companies were asked to sign the Accord by May 15. Meanwhile, the coalition of NGOs continued their campaign. By May 10, over one million people had expressed their support for the Accord through petitions.

At the time of the deadline of May 15, the success of the campaign became clear. More than thirty companies signed the Accord – first H&M and Inditex on May 13, followed two days later by Primark, C&A, PVH, Benetton, the Canadian Loblaw and others. The number of signatory companies would eventually increase to over 200. Moreover, because the Accord ensured independent, public reporting, it enables the coalition of NGOs to apply accountability politics as well. Accountability politics involve the eliciting public statement on an issue by a target organisation and subsequently, making such statements into an opportunity to expose the distance between discourse and practices. It was applied with regard to H&M when in September 2015, the NGOs published a critical evaluation of the company’s compliance with the Accord. In response to the findings, the NGOs introduced the hashtag #ComeCleanHM, organised protests, and mobilised over five thousand consumers to write letters to the company.

Aside from the global unions and the ILO – which was invited to act as independent chair of the Accord and rendered it additional legitimacy, external actors did contribute slightly. Online campaign groups helped to mobilise consumers, but were hard to cooperate with. Many European and North American government officials publicly spoke out in favour of the Accord. And after the Accord was enacted, the Bangladeshi government coordinated efforts with officials and experts from the Accord in order to ensure a comprehensive and efficient nationwide inspection system.

5. The Accord and influence

5.1. Introduction

In response to the campaign by the coalition of NGOs, more than thirty companies signed the Accord on Fire and Building Safety by the deadline of May 15, 2013.¹⁸⁴ Today, this number has risen to more than two hundred.¹⁸⁵ This chapter will offer an evaluation of the Accord. First, the unique character and the most important components of the Accord will be discussed. Hereafter, the outcomes and implications of the Accord will be reflected upon on the basis of the five stages of influence by Keck and Sikkink – ranging from issue creation and agenda setting to behavioural change – and the various forms of field settlement by Fligstein and McAdam – ranging from no change at all to fundamental change through the implementation of new shared understandings. It will be argued that although the NGOs achieved changes in the behaviour of many companies, the field of the global garment industry has not changed fundamentally.

5.2. The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh

The intensive campaign by the CCC, ILRF, MSN, WRC, and others finally resulted in the enactment of the Accord on May 15, 2013. Global union federations IndustriALL and UNI Global, Bangladeshi trade unions, the ILO, the coalition of NGOs, and over two hundred apparel companies have committed themselves to the five-year programme which aims to improve the fire and building safety conditions in garment factories in Bangladesh.¹⁸⁶ The most important components of the Accord concern equal representation, independent auditing, transparency, remediation, and worker empowerment.

First, the Accord provides for equal representation of trade unions and companies in a Steering Committee (SC), which also includes a representative from the ILO to act as a neutral chair. The SC performs the management of the Accord and dispute resolution if necessary. The SC is supported by an Advisory Board involving companies, suppliers, government institutions, trade unions, and NGOs.

Second, signatory companies are required to inspect all their suppliers, subdivided into three categories based on the suppliers' share in annual production. Tier 1 factories supply at least 30% of a company's annual production. Tier 2 factories are the remaining major or long-term suppliers. Together, these factories should supply at least 65% of the company's production in Bangladesh. Finally, Tier 3 factories are those factories which supply only occasional orders, one-time orders, or less than 10% of the company's production. Following the Accord, signatory companies should require suppliers Tier 1 factories to accept safety inspections, remediation, and fire safety training, Tier 2 factories should accept safety inspections and remediation, and Tier 3 factory shall only be subjected to limited initial inspections to identify high risks. If a Tier 3 factory is deemed to be high risk, it should be approached as if a Tier 2 factory.¹⁸⁷

Third, according to the text of the Accord, inspections will be independently carried out by fire and building safety experts. Their findings will be published in a written inspection report and publicly disclosed, accompanied by any remediation plans. If shortcomings are identified, the concerned companies should require the factory to implement corrective actions and they should ensure that sufficient funds are available for remediation. Moreover, renovations should not come at the expense

¹⁸⁴ CCC, Twitter post, May 15, 2013, 4.14 p.m., <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/334809131762462722>; "We made it! - Global Breakthrough as Retail Brands sign up to Bangladesh Factory Safety Deal," CCC; "Global Breakthrough as Retail Brands sign up to Bangladesh Factory Safety Deal," MSN, accessed February 5, 2017, <https://twitter.com/cleanclothes/status/334809131762462722>.

¹⁸⁵ "Signatories," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/signatories/>.

¹⁸⁶ "FAQs," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/about/faqs/>; Posthuma and Rossi, "Coordinated governance in global value chains," 197; *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh* (2013), last modified May 13, 2013, http://bangladeshaccord.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/the_accord.pdf.

¹⁸⁷ *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*.

of the workers. If, however, a loss of orders results in a decrease of employment, signatory companies should endeavour to offer alternative employment.¹⁸⁸

Finally, the Accord supports worker empowerment. The fire safety training programmes in Tier 1 factories should teach workers basic safety procedures and precautions and how to voice concerns. Furthermore, a complaint mechanism will be established in order to enable workers to report health and safety risks at all times. Finally, supplier factories are required to respect the right of workers to refuse unsafe work. This also includes the right of workers to refuse to enter or to remain inside a building that is believed to be unsafe.¹⁸⁹

The Accord is described as being unique and unprecedented, because it unites the key stakeholders in the Bangladeshi garment industry in a legally binding commitment.¹⁹⁰ In contrast to many other initiatives, such as the Fair Labor Association, the Accord provides equal representation of companies and global union federations.¹⁹¹ Moreover, in case of disputes, the Accord is legally enforceable "in a court of law of the domicile of the signatory against whom enforcement is sought."¹⁹²

5.3. Influence on companies

With their campaign, the NGOs achieved all stages of influence distinguished by Keck and Sikkink. After putting the fire and building safety in Bangladesh on the agenda, as illustrated in chapter 4, the NGOs pressurised companies to sign the Accord. H&M, Primark, Mango, GAP, Walmart, Inditex, Benetton, JC Penny, and Loblaw were targeted specifically. With the exception of the American companies GAP, Walmart, and JC Penny, these companies and many others eventually signed the Accord, thus declaring being "committed to the goal of a safe and sustainable Bangladeshi Ready-Made Garment ("RMG") industry in which no worker needs to fear fires, building collapses, or other accidents that could be prevented with reasonable health and safety measures."¹⁹³ Multiple companies paid attention to the Accord on their social media pages. For example, H&M posted repeatedly on Twitter that it was the first signatory to the Accord and also Benetton and C&A announced their participation.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, signatory companies publicly committed themselves to pragmatic and measurable, and thus enforceable, efforts. As the Accord has a time-span of five years, implementation is still ongoing.¹⁹⁵

It is difficult to determine whether specific companies have changed institutional procedures in response to the campaign by NGOs, because information about the creation of new departments, financial flows, or similar procedures is generally not publicly accessible. Yet, the Accord created a new institution, increased the transparency in the sector, and introduced a common standard for auditing and implementing remediation. First, the Accord has provided for the establishment of an institution responsible for the governance and implementation of the Accord. Companies are represented in the Steering Committee by three members, currently representatives from PVH, H&M (earlier N. Brown), and Inditex.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, companies have voting rights and election opportunities for representation at various occasions.¹⁹⁷ Second, the Accord requires the public disclosure of

¹⁸⁸ *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ "Bangladesh Accord overview," CCC, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/ua/2013/accord>; Reinecke and Donaghey, "The 'Accord for Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh,'" Posthuma and Rossi, "Coordinated governance in global value chains," 197.

¹⁹¹ "Charter Document," Fair Labor Organization, last modified February 12, 2014, http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/fla_charter_2-12-14.pdf;

¹⁹² *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ H&M, Twitter post, May 14, 2013, 6.52 a.m., <https://twitter.com/hm/status/334299661881982977>; C&A, Twitter post, May 13, 2013, 8.34 a.m., https://twitter.com/ca_europe/status/333968421819645956; Benetton, Twitter post, May 14, 2013, 9.17 a.m., <https://twitter.com/benetton/status/334341775252664320>.

¹⁹⁵ "About the Accord," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/about/>.

¹⁹⁶ "Governance," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/governance/>; "Implementation Team Report," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/2013/07/implementation-team-report/>.

¹⁹⁷ "FAQs," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

companies' supplying factories, including the factory's name and address, the number of stories, whether a building houses multiple garment factories and/or other businesses, and the number of workers at each factory.¹⁹⁸ Although this data is not publicly linked to the buying companies, it requires companies involved to improve internal transparency and involvement with contractors. Finally, the Accord introduced a common standard for auditing and remediation. Before the Accord, companies audited their Bangladeshi suppliers through different programmes, mostly a combination of self-monitoring and external monitoring based on the companies' own Codes of Conducts. For example, H&M had in place a "Full Audit Programme" in which approximately 100 experts, employed by the company itself, audited its supplier factories. The programme included an inspection of the factory, document checks, and interviews with management and workers. Additional audits to verify the companies' own findings were conducted by the Fair Labor Association (FLA).¹⁹⁹ Inditex also used a combination of internal and certified external auditors, both groups trained in the companies' social audit methodology. Unfortunately, Inditex has not disclosed the organisation performing the external audits.²⁰⁰ Through the Accord, at least with regard to Bangladesh, these various monitoring programmes were replaced by one.

Changes in the signatory companies' policy and behaviour regarding the purchasing of products and auditing of suppliers were achieved as well. On October 3, 2013, signatory companies together disclosed data on nearly 1,600 supplying factories, employing more than 2 million workers. The Accord spoke of an "unprecedented wealth of factory data," as some of the information had never been disclosed before.²⁰¹ By March 11, 2014, the first factory inspections reports were completed and published and by October 14, 2014, all initial factory inspections were finished. These inspections revealed more than 80,000 safety issues, most easily solvable. Yet, the inspections also revealed the structural integrity of seventeen buildings to be unacceptable.²⁰² By evacuating these buildings, a repetition of the Rana Plaza was possibly prevented. Currently, the fire, structural, and electrical reports and the corrective action plans of all 1,585 factories involved are disclosed on the website of the Accord and more than 6500 follow-up inspections have been carried out.²⁰³ Business relations with 53 factories have been terminated, due to their failure to participate.²⁰⁴

Mixed results were achieved regarding the implementation of remediation, for which companies and factories had to cooperate. More than half of the found safety issues have been corrected so far. Distinguished into electrical, fire, and structural issues, 67%, 49%, and 24% of the issues are corrected respectively.²⁰⁵ According to the Accord, simpler measures, such as reducing weight loads,

¹⁹⁸ "List of Factories," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/factories/list-factories/>.

¹⁹⁹ "H&M Sustainability Report 2012," H&M, accessed February 13, 2017, <https://about.hm.com/content/dam/hmgroupp/groupsite/documents/masterlanguage/CSR/reports/Conscious%20Actions%20Sustainability%20Report%202012.pdf>, p. 32-33.

²⁰⁰ "Annual Report 2012," Inditex, accessed February 13, 2017, https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/18789/Annual_report_2012.pdf/1f394d3f-55cc-49b8-af13-14f87f8da3de; "Annual Report 2013," Inditex, accessed February 13, 2017, https://www.inditex.com/documents/10279/18789/Inditex_Group_Annual_Report_2013.pdf/88b623b8-b6b0-4d38-b45e-45822932ff72.

²⁰¹ "Bangladesh Safety Accord Publishes Unprecedented Wealth of Factory Data," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/2013/10/bangladesh-safety-accord-publishes-unprecedented-wealth-of-factory-data/>; for a recent overview, see: "Public Disclosure Report" Accord on Fire and Building Safety, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/wp-content/uploads/Accord-Public-Disclosure-Report-1-February-2017.pdf>.

²⁰² "Publication of first Accord structural, fire and electrical safety inspection reports," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/2014/03/publication-of-first-accord-safety-inspection-reports/>; "ACCORD reaches important milestone by completing initial inspections of factories in Bangladesh," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/2014/10/accord-reaches-important-milestone-completing-initial-inspections-factories-bangladesh/>.

²⁰³ "Inspection Reports and Corrective Action Plans," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://accord.fairfactories.org/ffcweb/Web/ManageSuppliers/InspectionReportsEnglish.aspx>; "Progress," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/progress/>.

²⁰⁴ "Terminated suppliers," Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/terminated-suppliers/>.

²⁰⁵ "Progress," Accord of Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

could be implemented immediately. More substantial requirements, such as installing fire doors and strengthening columns in the buildings, require more efforts and thus are more likely to be delayed.²⁰⁶ Even more, despite these positive signals, just 3% of the corrective actions plans (CAPs) is on track or completed.²⁰⁷ CAPs contain an outline of the actions to be taken, with clear timelines and a financial plan, signed by the factory owners and the companies involved.²⁰⁸ CAPs apply to specific factories; in other words: 97% of the factories is behind schedule with implementing remediation. As touched upon in chapter 4, such findings were reason for the NGOs to target H&M over the gap between its discourse and results. Furthermore, it is argued that these programmes are mainly utilised for promotional purposes; counterbalancing public pressures. In this manner, they legitimise the rules of the field and defend the dominant perspective.²⁰⁹

Finally, although many companies signed the Accord, several others did not. Mostly American companies, including Walmart, GAP, and JC Penny did not join the Accord. Instead, they launched their own, much weaker, initiative; the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety.²¹⁰ According to a comparison between the Alliance and the Accord drawn by the Clean Clothes Campaign, the Alliance is “a unilateral corporate initiative, designed and governed by corporations with no involvement by independent worker representatives.”²¹¹ Furthermore, the inspections are not carried out independently, but they are controlled by the companies involved, and workers have no means to enforce the measures in the programme.²¹² This move seems to fit a pattern, as already in the 1990s “apparel retailers like Wal-Mart, Sears, and Target stayed away from labor standards certification—at least until weaker versions had been created by industry associations.”²¹³

Even though the implementation of remediation is behind schedule and not all companies that were targeted have joined the Accord, the NGOs have achieved changes in the behaviour of many companies. Because of the Accord, supply chains have become more transparent, more reliable information about the fire and building safety conditions has been disclosed, and factories have been made safer at least partially.

5.4. Influence on the strategic action field

Despite these accomplishments, the strategic action field of the global garment industry has not changed fundamentally.²¹⁴

The industry is still characterised by an economic focus, fragmentation, and poor working conditions. Between 2012 and 2015, global clothing exports increased slightly.²¹⁵ The companies discussed in chapter 3 – Inditex, H&M, and TJX Cos – all saw their sales increase between 2011 and 2015, ranging from 34% (Inditex) to 41% (H&M and TJX Cos).²¹⁶ Producing countries are still highly dependent on their clothing exports. For example, in 2015, the clothing exports of Bangladesh and Cambodia accounted for 82% and 50% of the countries’ total exports.²¹⁷ Yet, with regard to Bangladesh, an interesting development seems to have taken place. Although the clothing exports from the country increased considerably in the last few years, the number of garment factories has fallen sharply in

²⁰⁶ “ACCORD reaches important milestone by completing initial inspections of factories in Bangladesh,” Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

²⁰⁷ “Progress,” Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

²⁰⁸ “Remediation,” Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://bangladeshaccord.org/remediation/>.

²⁰⁹ Bartley, “Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards,” 224.

²¹⁰ Sarah Butler, “North American brands’ plan for factory safety labelled a sham,” *The Guardian*, July 11, 2013.

²¹¹ “Comparison: Safety Accord and the Gap/Walmart scheme,” CCC, accessed February 14, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/resources/background/comparison-safety-accord-and-the-gap-walmart-scheme/view>.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Tim Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization: The Rise of Transnational Private Regulation of Labor and Environmental Conditions,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113 no. 2 (2007), 337.

²¹⁴ For an assessment of the garment industry before the Rana Plaza disasters, see chapter 3.

²¹⁵ “International Trade and Market Access Data,” WTO.

²¹⁶ Data generated from: “The World’s Biggest Public Companies 2016,” *Forbes*, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/>; “The World’s Biggest Public Companies 2011,” *Forbes*.

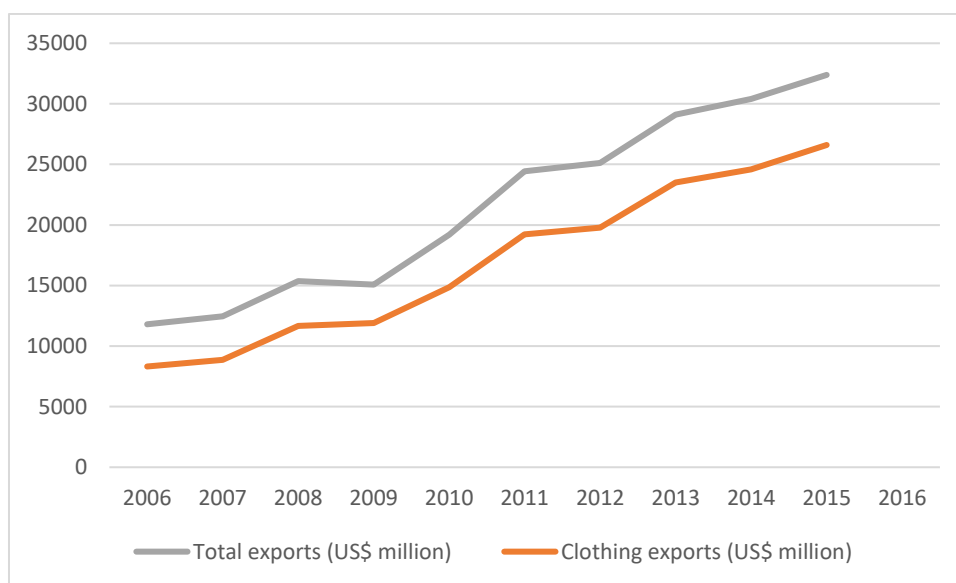
²¹⁷ “International Trade and Market Access Data,” WTO.

2013, as can be seen in Figure 6.²¹⁸ This can be attributed to the Rana Plaza disaster and the initiatives launched in response. According to representatives of the Bangladeshi garment industry, the increased inspections after the Rana Plaza disaster led to the closure of around 200 factories.²¹⁹ This might indicate a growing reluctance of Western companies to work with factories that cannot sufficiently guarantee the safety of their employees.²²⁰ However, according to Freedom House:

“... working conditions remain extremely unsafe, and comprehensive reforms of the system are hampered by the fact that a growing number of factory owners are also legislators or influential businesspeople.”²²¹

Moreover, the Accord cannot entirely eliminate the practices of subcontracting, as “it is impossible for the Accord alone to end the practice of unauthorised subcontracting.”²²² As such, suppliers designated as ‘safe,’ can still subcontract orders to factories which are not approved.

Figure 5. Exports from Bangladesh²²³



²¹⁸ “International Trade and Market Access Data,” WTO; “Trade information,” BGMEA.

²¹⁹ “Bangladesh 2016,” Freedom House.

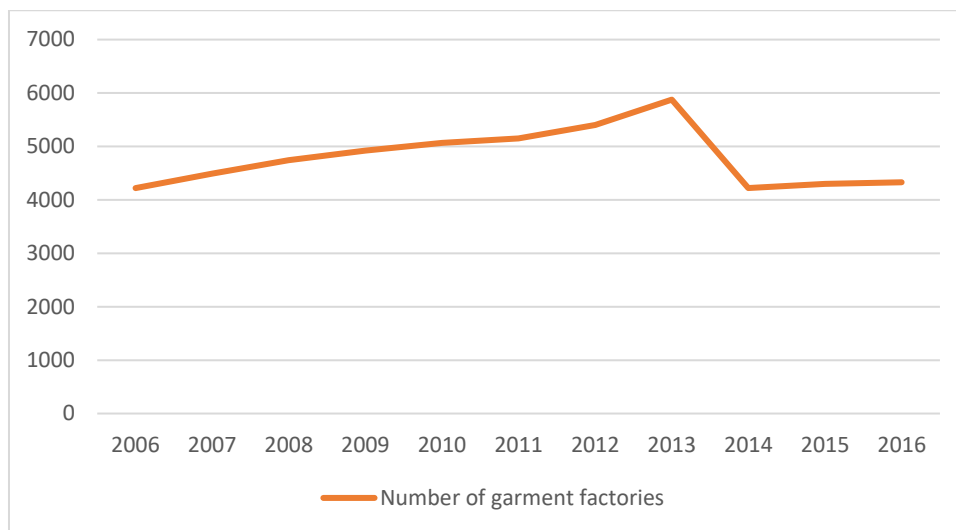
²²⁰ The termination of business relationships is discussed in paragraph 5.3.

²²¹ “Bangladesh 2016,” Freedom House.

²²² “FAQs,” Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

²²³ Figure made by the author. Data gathered from: “International Trade and Market Access Data,” WTO.

Figure 6. The garment industry in Bangladesh²²⁴



In addition, as the Accord has not led to similar initiatives in other garment producing countries, displacement may have occurred. This seems to be supported by a recent report of SOMO (The Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations), Action Labor Rights (ALR), and Labour Rights Defenders and Promoters (LRDP) about the garment sector in Myanmar. According to this report, Myanmar has witnessed “a turbulent growth of the export-oriented garment industry” since 2012, with a tripling of the number of factories.²²⁵ Companies such as H&M, Primark, and C&A are linked to factories in the country.²²⁶ These companies are all signatories to the Accord and thus promised to improve the fire and building safety in Bangladesh.²²⁷ Yet, in Myanmar, they are associated with the same poor fire and building safety conditions that caused so many disasters in Bangladesh.²²⁸

These developments seem to indicate that no fundamental change has occurred in response to the Rana Plaza disaster and the subsequent contention. That TNCs are the dominant actors in the field and that the field reflects their interest for profits over people still are the shared understandings. Because companies were more enthusiast to declare they joined than to push for implementation of remediation plans and because the Accord only applies to Bangladesh and has not been followed by similar initiatives for other garment producing countries, the enactment should be seen as concessions granted by the TNCs in order to appease consumers and to prevent NGOs from forcing them to commit to more drastic measures. A similar development had taken place in the 1990s. According to Bartley, “the origins of corporate codes of conduct and voluntary labor standards policies lay largely in firms’ attempts to preempt or co-opt public pressures.”²²⁹ The Rana Plaza disaster created the pressure for companies to act, but now attention has faded, it seems that many companies returned to business as usual.

Yet, that the field has not changed fundamentally, does not mean it has not changed at all. As discussed, the coalition of NGOs has achieved some changes in the behaviour of many companies: transparency has increased and many safety issues are remedied. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza and the subsequent campaign, the reach of the NGOs increased. The CCC saw its followers on social media accrue from 2616 in 2011 to almost 40,000 by the end of 2015.²³⁰ ILRF’s followers

²²⁴ Figure made by the author. Data gathered from: “Trade information,” BGMEA.

²²⁵ SOMO, ALR, and LRDP, *The Myanmar Dilemma*, accessed February 24, 2017, <https://www.somo.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Myanmar-Dilemma-Full-Report.pdf>, p.57.

²²⁶ Ibid., p.61-62.

²²⁷ “Signatories,” Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh; *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*.

²²⁸ SOMO, ALR, and LRDP, *The Myanmar Dilemma*, 86.

²²⁹ Bartley, “Corporate Accountability and the Privatization of Labor Standards,” 224.

²³⁰ “Annual report 2015,” CCC, accessed February 25, 2017,

“Annual report 2011,” CCC, accessed February 25, 2017, <https://cleanclothes.org/about/annual-reports/2011-annual-report/view>; “Annual report 2012,” CCC; “Jaarverslag 2013,” SKC; “Jaarverslag 2014,” SKC, accessed

on Twitter almost doubled between September 2013 and January 2016 to 12,800.²³¹ As such, these NGOs – whose main tactic is the mobilisation of consumers – have improved their leverage vis-à-vis the TNCs in the field. These incremental changes may someday have the potential to undermine the shared understandings supporting the field's ordering.

5.5. Conclusion

The vigorous campaign by the coalition of NGOs has resulted in the enactment and implementation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety. Today, over two hundred companies have signed the Accord, which provides equal representation, independent auditing, transparency, remediation, and worker empowerment. Moreover, the Accord is seen as unique because it unites the key stakeholders in the Bangladeshi garment industry – including international and national labour unions, NGOs, the ILO, and apparel companies and retailers – in a legally binding, time-bound commitment.

With regard to many companies, including H&M and Inditex, all stages of influence were achieved. By signing the Accord, the companies adjusted their discourses by committing themselves to “the goal of a safe and sustainable Bangladeshi Ready-Made Garment (“RMG”) industry in which no worker needs to fear fires, building collapses, or other accidents that could be prevented with reasonable health and safety measures.” Also institutional procedures were changed, because the Accord created a new institution, increased the transparency in the sector, and introduced a common standard for auditing and implementing remediation. Finally, the NGOs achieved changes in the companies’ policy and behaviour. As a result of the Accord, supply chains have become more transparent as data on nearly 1,600 supplying factories was disclosed. More importantly, more than half of the safety issues has been corrected.

However, despite these achievements, the settlement of the contention in the form of the Accord has not equalled the fundamental change of the field. Several cases indicate that NGOs have not been able to successfully implement new shared understandings. That 97% of all involved factories is behind schedule with implementing remediation, that the Accord only applies to Bangladesh and no similar initiatives are set up for other garment producing countries, that many American companies did not sign the Accord, and, most of all, that working conditions in the garment sector are still extremely poor, indicate that the field is still ruled by companies with a ‘profits over people’-mentality. After all, the Rana Plaza disaster created the pressure for companies to act, but now attention has faded, it seems that many companies returned to business as usual.

February 25, 2017, <http://schonekleren.nl/over-ons/over-ons/beleid/jaarstukken/jaarverslag-2014/view>; “Annual report 2015,” CCC.

²³¹ “Twitter ILRF,” Internet Archive: Wayback Machine.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has examined how a coalition of four Western NGOs has applied information politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics in response to the Bangladeshi Rana Plaza disaster of April 2013 in order to pressurise transnational apparel companies active in the strategic action field of the global garment industry to enact and implement the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. The NGOs – the Dutch Clean Clothes Campaign, the American International Labor Rights Forum and Worker Rights Consortium, and the Canadian Maquila Solidarity Network – are involved in the anti-sweatshop network and as such, strive for improvement in the working conditions in the global garment industry. This industry concerns the production of clothes. It is an economic and globalised field characterised by poor working conditions due to an emphasis on cheap and fast production. This thesis will focus on the efforts by the coalition of NGOs as challengers in the field to influence the dominant incumbents; large transnational apparel companies. Eventually, these efforts resulted in the enactment and implementation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh; a legally-binding agreement that units many of the key stakeholders in the Bangladeshi garment industry and that provides for independent auditing, remediation, and transparency. In this thesis, the global garment industry has been analysed as an “strategic action field.” In order to evaluate the impact of the Accord, this analysis has focused on the field during stability, before the Rana Plaza disaster. The campaign by the coalition of NGOs has been examined on the basis of three mechanisms of the mobilisation process, namely “attribution of threat or opportunity,” “social appropriation,” and “innovative action.” The latter is then subdivided into “information politics,” “symbolic politics,” “leverage politics,” and “accountability politics.” Finally, the achieved influence of the NGOs on transnational garment companies and the global garment industry as a whole will be evaluated through use of the five stages of influence – issue creation and agenda setting, discursive positions, institutional procedures, policy change, or behavioural change – and the possible form of settlement of contention – ranging from no change at all to fundamental change of the field. With this endeavour, this thesis tries to answer the following research question: *“How have Western NGOs pushed for the enactment and implementation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh in the strategic action field of the global garment industry?”*

In order to explain the push for the Accord by the coalition of NGOs, the global garment industry should be seen as a strategic action field; a constructed social space in which actors interact and strive for control and power. In this field, transnational garment companies are the incumbents, i.e. the dominant actors. These companies have ample economic resources and as garment producing countries are highly dependent on the industry for state revenues and employment, these companies have disproportioned power. Moreover, the companies enjoy cultural resources created by a prevailing culture of consumerism, i.e. fast fashion, in the Western world. These resources manifest itself when despite disclosures of human rights violations, consumers continue to buy these companies’ products. The interests and views of the incumbents are reflected in the organisation of the field, as their desire for cheap production and fast delivery has become the standard. Wages in garment producing countries are substantially lower and the enforcement of social legislation is considerably less developed than in North America and Europe. The poor working conditions manifest themselves in an important shared understanding in the field, namely “profit over people.”

NGOs, on the other hand, operate as challengers in the global garment industry; they are actors that strive for an alternative ordering of the field, but wield little influence. In order to obviate the lack of resources they have at their disposal, the coalition of NGOs resort to a strategy of “smoke and mirrors” which with they try to project an image of a large, well-resourced organisation and they combine their ideological agenda with their ability to exploit transnational garment companies’ dependency on their “brand image” through the mobilisation of consumers. In response to the Rana Plaza disaster of April 2013, this is exactly what they did.

On Wednesday April 24 2013, the Rana Plaza building – which housed multiple garment factories – came crashing down. Eventually, over 1,100 people died in the disaster. The disaster was followed by a “blame game,” in which industry officials, Bangladeshi government officials, Western governments, and companies all tried to lay the blame on each other. The coalition of NGOs successfully recognised the disaster as a “game changer.” They had already been cooperating with

the global unions federations IndustriALL and UNI Global Union for years to draft proposals and agreements to improve the fire and building safety in the industry. Yet, the Accord created a window of opportunity and the NGOs commenced employing information politics and moral leverage politics by using social media, websites, newspaper articles, protests, petitions, and similar sources. Information politics involves framing the case in question as the consequence of conscious human action, identifying responsible actors, and proposing credible solutions. Moral leverage politics is the “naming of shaming” of targets in front of influential actors.

By framing the collapse as the result of the “profit over people”-method of transnational garment companies and by targeting specific companies in front of their consumers, the NGOs exploited the vulnerabilities of their targets. In the meantime, the coalition of NGOs and the global union federations drafted a new safety agreement; the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. The global union federations negotiated this Accord with the garment companies as they could rely on previously established relationships with many of the companies and because they were seen as more appropriate partners than the NGOs. The NGOs pressurised the companies through mobilising consumers. By May 10, over one million people had expressed their support for the Accord through petitions and by May 13, the first companies – H&M and Inditex – signed the Accord. At the time of the deadline, which was set at May 15, thirty companies had signed the Accord – including Primark, C&A, PVH, Benetton, and the Canadian Loblaw. In 2015, the NGOs applied accountability politics as well. Accountability politics involves the exposition of the distance between discourse and practices by target actors. Because the Accord publicly disclosed the progress of remediation, NGOs could use this information to critically evaluate the compliance of H&M. In response to the findings, the NGOs introduced the hashtag #ComeCleanHM, organised protests, and mobilised over five thousand consumers to write letters to the company.

Eventually, over two hundred companies signed the Accord. It is seen as unique because of its legally binding character and because it unites the key stakeholders in the Bangladeshi garment industry – including international and national labour unions, NGOs, the ILO, and apparel companies and retailers. The Accord provides equal representation, independent auditing, transparency, remediation, and worker empowerment.

The impact of the NGOs has been evaluated on the basis of the five stages of influence – issue creation and agenda setting, discursive positions, institutional procedures, policy change, and behavioural change – and the possible forms of settlement of contention – ranging from no change at all to fundamental change of the field through the implementation of new shared understandings. With regard to the signatory companies, all five stages of influence were achieved. The Accord was set on the agenda and by signing, companies changed their discourses. Moreover, the Accord created a new institution, increased the transparency in the sector, and introduced a common standard for auditing and implementing remediation. Policies and behaviour of companies were influenced as well. Eventually, data on nearly 1,600 supplying factories was disclosed and more than half of the safety issues were corrected.

However, the strategic action field has not changed fundamentally. This is accounted for by several factors. First, almost all factories involved with the Accord are behind schedule with implementing remediation. Second, the safety issues that have been resolved seem to be the simpler ones. Remediation of the more substantial requirements – such as structural issues – is more likely to be delayed. Third, the Accord only applies to Bangladesh and no similar initiative are set up for other garment producing countries. Fourth, many American companies – including Walmart and GAP – did not sign the Accord, but instead joined the much weaker Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. And finally, working conditions in the industry are still extremely poor. Thus, although over two hundred apparel companies have signed the Accord and although many safety issues have been solved, it seems that the coalition of NGOs have been unable to successfully replace the shared understanding of “profit over people” with their own ideological understandings.

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