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den Hond, F, Stolwijk, S & Merk, J 2014, 'A strategic-interaction analysis of an urgent appeal system and its outcomes for garment workers', *MOBILIZATION: an international journal*, Volume 19, Issue 1, Pages 83-112.

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## **A Strategic-Interaction Analysis of an Urgent Appeal System and its Outcomes for Garment Workers\***

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### **Abstract**

Within the global garment industry, an urgent appeal is a request for action to Western activist groups for support in a specific case of labor rights violations. The urgent appeal system has become an important strategy for the transnational antisweatshop movement. It is distinct from the movement's other strategies because it directly supports garment workers in their struggle for improved labor conditions while simultaneously informing and mobilizing Western consumers about substandard labor conditions in the garment industry. This paper explores how reflexivity in the use of this particular strategy, strategic choice in its implementation, and interaction with allies and targets affect outcomes for garment workers. It confirms the relevance of the emerging strategic-interaction perspective in explaining movement outcomes.

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\* The paper has benefitted from comments by Frank de Bakker, Bert Klandermans, Jacqueline Stekelenburg, and Sarah Soule. We thank them for their suggestions.

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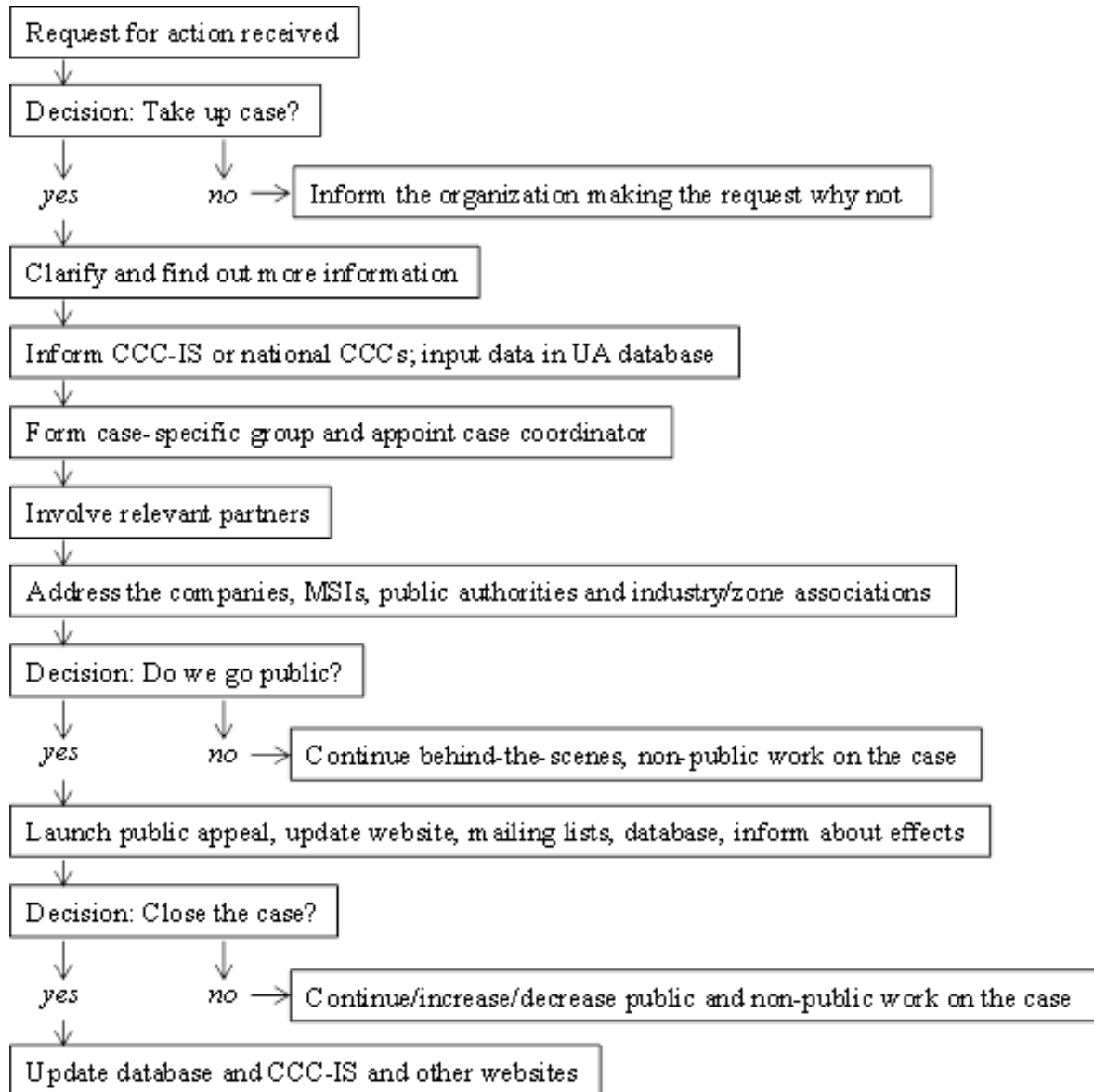
## **INTRODUCTION**

June 2000: the International Secretariat of the Clean Cloths Campaign (CCC) receives a request for an urgent appeal (UA) concerning the British-Thai Synthetic Textile Company, based in Thailand. This company is a well-established supplier in the garment industry: it has around 1,300 workers, and produces for some 20 major Western brands, including Gant, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger. In the UA request, the firm's labor union and a local community-based organization, representing the workers, claim that management has decreased working hours, cut salaries in half, and dismissed a union leader while continuing to recruit new workers, and that it persists in these practices despite a ruling by the Thai Labour Department. There are also health and safety issues due to the use of chemicals for dyeing textiles.

Apparently, the workers and their representatives have been unable to convince the company to redress these issues, hence their move to seek transnational support for their demands. The CCC International Secretariat decides to take up the request, and to have its country branches in the Netherlands and Germany to act upon it. They ask several of the company's customers to investigate and resolve the problems. In the course of the events, it is decided to make the urgent appeal public: the CCC's constituencies and the general public are asked to send protest letters to Gant, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger, referring to their corporate Codes of Conduct. In response, Tommy Hilfiger conducts its own investigation, finding the allegations to be true; consequently it demands that the British-Thai Synthetic Textile Company introduce reforms. The case closes with a positive outcome for the workers, as the company meets their demands. (CCC Urgent Appeal database)

This example of an urgent appeal exposes its defining characteristics. An urgent appeal is a request from representatives of garment workers, such as a (local) labor union or community organization, to Western activist groups to take action on a specific case of labor rights violations. If the request is taken up, the Western activist group will demand that the factory management, the brands and retailers that source from this factory, and potentially other authorities redress the violations. If made public, an urgent appeal becomes "a request for people to take action, usually in the form of protest letters addressed to the brands, employers and authorities involved, on a specific case of labor rights violation" (Sluiter 2009: 272). It thus directly connects workers and their organizations in the global garment production network (Levy 2008)

to Western antisweatshop activists, and through them—when the urgent appeal is made public—to Western publics and consumers. Figure 1 is a flow chart that summarizes the UA process once a request for support is received. Although the request for support is one stage in a longer lasting conflict at the production site, the focus of the analysis here is on the subsequent stages after the request has been made and taken up.



**Figure 1** Flowchart of Urgent Appeal Process

When the CCC started to develop its UA system in the mid-1990s, it was an important innovation (McAdam 1983) in the antisweatshop movement’s repertoire of contention (Tilly 1979); according to a CCC spokesperson, it was another “experiment” to gain leverage over the brands and retailers in the industry. The UA system can be conceived

of as a particular strategy of this movement, as it includes a distinctive set of interrelated decisions about tactics, claims, targets, alliances, etc. (Meyer and Staggenborg 2012). In the early 1990s, the movement's support for garment workers depended largely on Western activists coming to visit them and their factories, investigating their working conditions, and campaigning around the results of their investigations in North America, Australia and Europe. This campaign strategy is essentially contentious, as it seeks to tarnish corporate reputations. It has continued to be important, but since the mid-1990s the movement has also been looking for other strategies to convince the brands and retailers in the industry to respect labor rights in their supply chains (Kryst 2012). Notably, the movement started to collaborate with brands and retailers through multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) in order to develop and implement labor standards and associated monitoring and verification systems (Bartley 2003; O'Rourke 2006), and to stimulate political consumerism and affect the valuation of products in the market—a form of market-based pressure (Balsiger 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier 2013; Sluiter 2009). In this context, the UA system was yet another strategy, an experimental and distinctive one that enabled the workers themselves to take the initiative in seeking transnational support for their causes. However, urgent appeals have remained outside the focus of analysis in the large body of literature on transnational labor solidarity and antisweatshop activism, most likely because of difficulties in collecting data on urgent appeals.

We were granted access to the CCC Urgent Appeals database, in which data are stored on all the UA requests that the CCC adopted. Our study is unique in being able to comparatively analyze a large number of cases; to date, most studies of transnational labor rights activism have analyzed no more than a few cases at a time. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing a large number of UA cases drawn from the CCC Urgent Appeals database, complemented with archival data and interviews with CCC staff, allows us to make the three following contributions.

First, we expand the literature on the movement's repertoire of contention by describing the CCC UA system in detail. Second, the database allows us to explore whether urgent appeals may help garment workers to improve their labor conditions. For example, in the case of the British-Thai Synthetic Textile Company, the outcome of the urgent appeal was positive for the workers, but in many other cases worker demands are not satisfied, or not completely satisfied. We contribute to the literature on movement outcomes by highlighting a series of protest cases in which protest and

outcome are relatively closely associated: each individual urgent appeal is characterized by specific labor rights violations at a particular factory that supplies a defined set of brands (Merk 2009; Sluiter 2009).

Jasper (2011) asserts that because protestors rarely get what they want, it is all the more relevant to try understanding why they sometimes do succeed. The third contribution builds on this assertion, acknowledging that the task of understanding movement outcomes is a research problem that has generated considerable interest (Giugni 2008). It is increasingly recognized that, in important ways, protest is intentional and interactive. Movement leaders (and their opponents) make interrelated strategic choices regarding tactics, claims, targets, alliances, timing, etc. (Meyer and Staggenborg 2012), and do so in response to, in interaction with, and in anticipation of choices made by targets and allies (Jasper 2011). They are “reflective” (Schön 1983), in that such choices are not only embedded in the sequence of events around the action of the moment, but also informed by previous experiences and the intention to realize particular goals. We contribute to this emerging strategic-interaction approach by exploring in what ways reflexivity, strategic choice, and interaction may be relevant to explaining urgent appeal outcomes for garment workers.

## **THE CCC URGENT APPEAL SYSTEM**

Over the past few decades, the garment industry has become highly globalized due to extensive outsourcing of the labor-intensive parts of the production process to low-wage countries (Bonacich, Cheng, Chinchilla, and Ong 1994; Sassen 1988). Brands and retailers have increasingly specialized in design, marketing, and sales. Production is sourced from an extensive and complex network of suppliers, contractors, and subcontractors. In turn, many suppliers and (sub)contractors produce for multiple brands and retailers (Locke, Qin, and Brause 2007). It is a prime example of a global production network, in which economic production is disaggregated and dispersed to multiple geographic locations where wages, labor practices, and consumption patterns differ vastly from those where the products are sold (Levy 2008). This move from integrated to outsourced production has enabled the brands and retailers in this industry to break away from traditional labor relations (Wills 2009) and to distance themselves socially from responsibility over large labor forces (McIntyre 2008).

Substandard labor conditions at supplier factories turned into a public issue in the late 1980s. A significant antisweatshop social movement emerged, comprising individuals

and organizations from various backgrounds (Micheletti and Stolle 2007). The movement has characteristics of a new social movement—for example, its critique of the thoughtless, and thereby unethical, mass-consumption in Western markets and its emphasis on the externalities of globalized production networks. However, its main ambition is to improve labor conditions for garment workers by bringing “back to the [transnational corporation] level some responsibility for workers no matter in whose employment they are or in what part of the world they live” (CCC 2000). As such, elements and sentiments related to the “old” labor movement (Micheletti and Stolle 2007), with its emphasis on trade unions and labor solidarity, are blended in to the movement. The main challenge it faces is simultaneously to “re-establish the link...between brands and retailers in the North and workers in supplier factories in the South” (Rodríguez-Garavito 2005: 204) and to appeal to audiences in Western countries, for many of whom solidarity with exploited workers is not their prime concern. Nevertheless, appealing to these audiences and their lifestyle preferences and involving them in campaigns that target the reputational capital of brands and retailers means that consumers are turned into a “resource and an opportunity for pro-worker struggles” (Castree, Coe, Ward, and Samers 2004: 221). In a context where national public authorities were unwilling or unable to act as reliable enforcers of labor laws (Elliot and Freeman 2003; Rodríguez-Garavito 2005: 212), this tension stimulated the movement to search for ways by which it would gain leverage over the industry (cf. Kryst 2012): it hence developed various strategies that are both effective at the transnational level and appealing to its Western supporters.

Four such strategies build on the corporate variant of Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) boomerang model for transnational activism (den Hond and de Bakker 2012). They are complementary and partly overlapping in their recombination of elements from the movement’s repertoire of contention, but are analytically distinct. The contentious strategy seeks to affect the reputations of brands and retailers through media campaigns; the collaborative strategy, as in MSIs, involves working with brands and retailers on the formulation and implementation of labor standards that include certification, monitoring, and verification mechanisms; the market-based strategy emphasizes political consumerism; the UA system is a fourth strategy that is in direct support of workers in the industry. Urgent appeals are thus one strategy by which the movement has attempted to improve the labor conditions of workers in the garment industry. Table 1 characterizes the contentious, collaborative, and market-based approaches. Here we discuss how the UA system differs from these other three

strategies. Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the UA system in the boomerang model for transnational activism.

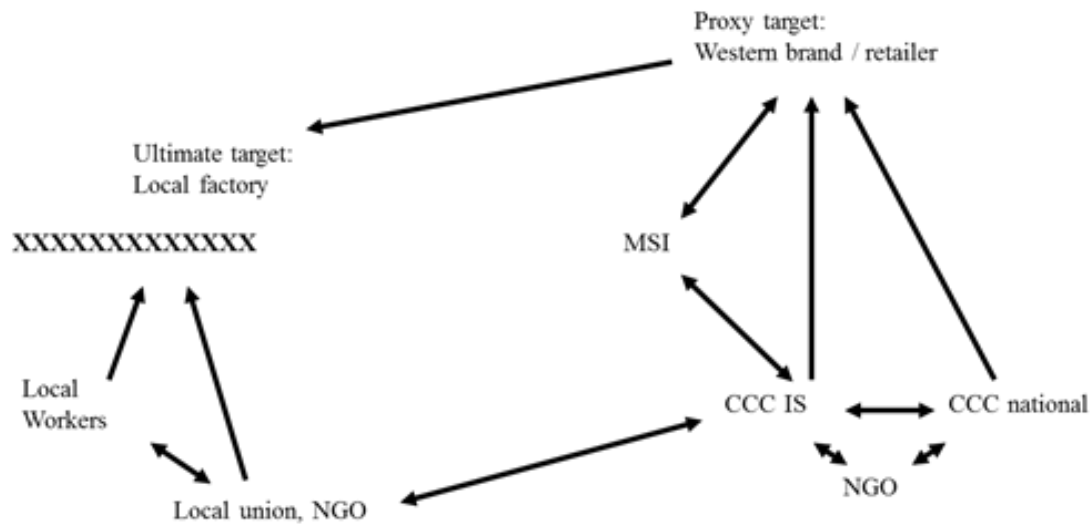
**Table 1 Contentious, Collaborative, and Market-Based Strategies**

Contentious	Much effort has been devoted by antisweatshop groups to <i>campaign</i> against branded corporations over labor conditions in the factories in their production networks. Protest is aimed at affecting their reputations in Western markets. For example, the dissemination of “damaging information” through “leaflets, rallies, demonstrations, teach-ins, videos, and Websites...can undermine the [brand’s] public image or weaken its links with key customers” (Armbruster-Sandoval 2004: 14). Corporate marketing messages, brands, logo’s, and symbols, are subverted in order to disrupt, distort, and satirize firms’ reputations and their dominant positions in cultures of unrestricted and unreflective mass consumption (Carducci 2006). Celebrity endorsement, petitions, demonstrations, and rallies are among the elements used in campaigning. Organizing boycotts has not been among the tactics used, because of the risk that it could rebound on the workers (cf. Turcotte, Bellefeuille and den Hond 2007).
Collaborative	Collaborative efforts to create <i>labor standards</i> were adopted in response to the formulation of corporate codes of conduct by brands such as Nike and Levi’s in the early 1990s. These codes stimulated the movement to make explicit what it viewed as minimally acceptable, or desirable, labor conditions, as well as to take a position regarding issues such as (external) verification, certification, and complaint mechanisms. The emergence of multi-stakeholder initiatives as cross-sector collaborations to address the issues by mutual agreement on the setting and implementation of labor standards occurred in the mid-1990s, at the same time as similar initiatives were being taken in other industries (Tamm Hallström and Boström 2010).
Market-based	<i>Political consumerism</i> refers to the movement’s attempts to influence how consumers select among producers and products by encouraging them to take into account a broader set of valuation criteria. This strategy extends the contentious and collaborative strategies by politicizing the market place. Sometimes, individual choice is emphasized; in other instances, collective forms such as boycotting and buycotting are emphasized. Logos and labels are important signifiers for political consumerism (Boström and Klintman 2008). Balsiger (2010) reports how CCC Switzerland took the political consumerism strategy by staging alternative fashion shows and printing booklets and maps to inform consumers where clean clothes might be purchased locally. Micheletti and Stolle (2007) suggest that the impact of this strategy is less in actually changing consumer demand and more in signaling to firms that campaign claims are broadly shared, as evidenced in consumer polls and data on the market shares of socially or environmentally differentiated products (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013). Early examples of political consumerism are reported in Friedman (1996), Sklar (1998), and other studies.

All four strategies involve a scale shift (Soule 2009; Tarrow 2005), as violations of labor rights upstream of the supply chain are a reason for mobilization in Western countries. All four address one or more brands and retailers as a proxy target in order to instigate change at the local production factory, the ultimate target (figure 2). But the first three primarily address firms and consumers in Western markets; the ultimate target is not implicated in these strategies, and therefore they only have an indirect effect on labor

conditions. The UA system, however, is designed to include the ultimate target in the protest, and hence to have a direct effect. The strategy is distinctive in four respects: urgent appeals pose specific demands, focus on short-term outcomes, link directly to garment workers, and yet are responsive in nature. This combination makes urgent appeals attractive for the evaluation of their outcomes.

First, each urgent appeal contains a specific demand in relation to a particular case of labor rights abuse, such as workers being fired for unionizing activities.



**Figure 2 The Urgent Appeal System as a Corporate Boomerang**

Note: Double-headed arrows indicate information exchange, single-headed arrows indicate pressure. The line of X:s indicates the impossibility to find a local solution to the conflict between the factory management and the workers and their representatives.

As such, a public urgent appeal is more comparable to how Amnesty International regularly urges its adherents to write letters in support of individual prisoners of conscience than to the letter writing and petitioning that are occasionally used in anticorporate campaigns. Hence, and second, urgent appeals are primarily oriented towards achieving short-term outcomes that benefit garment workers. This is not to say that urgent appeals cannot have long-term, structural outcomes, but their specificity and focus make it less likely that any urgent appeal on its own will contribute much to such outcomes.

Third, the UA system directly supports garment workers, as urgent appeals are initiated by the workers themselves (or by their local representatives): they decide whether and



when to call for international support through an urgent appeal, and they decide what demands will be made. This is important given the lack of attention to workers' views and voices in much of the literature on the antisweatshop movement, in particular to how their voices are "in practice included or excluded in the processes of setting and implementing codes of conduct, and whether and how codes of conduct enable workers to organize and strengthen their voices in this and other debates" (Rodríguez-Garavito 2005: 205). The attention to workers' voices feeds the critique of (corporate) codes of conducts as merely being instruments of corporate reputation management in Western markets (e.g., Esbenschade 2004), and the portrayal of corporate social responsibility as a "continuation of the old colonial strategy of reputation management among elite publics at the expense of marginalized publics" (Munshi and Kurian 2005: 513). Thus, UA work allows the movement to show that it is not an uncritical supporter of the corporate project of social responsibility.

Finally, UA work is difficult to manage, because workers decide whether and when to send out a UA request. It can be managed in the sense of allocating time and resources to UA work and deciding whether or not to lend support to particular UA requests. But what cannot be managed is how many UA requests are made, when, and from where. The UA strategy is responsive to what happens in the industry. Therefore, UA work is relatively unconnected to the other strategies of the movement.

## **THEORIZING URGENT APPEAL OUTCOMES**

These four characteristics make urgent appeals a unique natural setting for the study of outcomes. Of course, explaining movement outcomes is notoriously difficult for various conceptual and methodological reasons (Amenta and Young 1999; Earl 2000; Giugni 1998). Most studies of movement outcomes focus on intended outcomes in relation to the movement's goals. For example, Gamson (1975) used two main outcome indicators: acceptance of movements as legitimate claim makers and the acquisition of new advantages for movements. Kitschelt (1986) added another outcome indicator, structural impact, which refers to the success of the movement in changing the structural conditions it faces. Movement outcomes may thus vary in nature and level of impact.

The antisweatshop movement has achieved various outcomes at different levels of impact. Bartley and Child (2011) argued that these include putting the issue on the agenda, raising consumer awareness, engaging in dialogue with brands and retailers,

getting brands and retailers to accept specific standards, and having an effect on sales and stock prices. Others pointed out how activities of the antisweatshop movement, while being influential in these terms, have had only limited, partial, or temporary impact on the actual labor conditions for workers (Armbruster-Sandoval 2004). For example, critical observers of MSIs warned that only a small portion of transnational companies participate in them (Connor 2008) and argued that there is little evidence of MSIs having radically altered working conditions (Bartley 2011). In terms of Gamson's and Kitschelt's frameworks, it can be said that the antisweatshop movement has succeeded in becoming a legitimate claim maker and—occasionally—in obtaining advantages for workers, but has so far largely failed in changing the structural conditions in the global garment industry.

Apart from the question of how to identify such outcomes, there is the question of how they are achieved. This latter question has spurred considerable debate. Two dominant traditions in explaining movement outcomes can be distinguished. Giugni (2008) argues that initially the resource mobilization perspective was used as a theoretical lens. It focused particularly on the strength and components of the movement organization and on the effects of using disruptive tactics. This tradition might be relevant for studying the antisweatshop movement as it employs various disruptive tactics, including culture jamming and the subvertising of corporate brands and logos, naming and shaming in the mass media, and boycotting. Since the strength of transnational activist networks (TANs) is a critical factor in the effectiveness of boomerang politics (Keck and Sikkink 1989), this points to a strong movement organization being highly relevant for this field as well.

The resource mobilization tradition was criticized as being too reliant on human agency—as if outcomes depended only on the movement—and was consequently complemented with a more structural tradition. Various studies called for more attention to contextual factors, such as political opportunities (McAdam 1982; Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992). Political opportunities have been conceptualized in many different ways (Meyer and Minkoff 2004), ranging from those closely connected to the protest—e.g., access that protesters may have to members of the polity, the presence of elite allies—to more abstract conditions underlying the very possibility for mobilization and collective action. Such conditions might include, for example, legal bans on collective organization or mobilization, or the elite's propensity and capacity for repression of protest (Koopmans 1997; McAdam 1996).

The political opportunities tradition suggests how movement outcomes are contingent on social and political factors external to the movement, such as political opportunity structures and public opinion (Giugni 2008). In this tradition, understanding outcomes of the antisweatshop movement implies looking at various nested opportunities at the firm, industry, country, and transnational levels (Soule 2009), as brought about by factors such as changes in the governance of brands, competitive positions and relationships, economic conditions, and media coverage (King 2008; McAteer and Pulver 2009).

Several studies have been able to combine, conceptually and empirically, these two traditions (e.g., King 2008), and thus to address the structure-agency dualism in explaining movement outcomes. However, for some, such attempts still fail to address the more fundamental point of structural bias in these traditions, as both resources and opportunities are socially constructed (Goodwin and Jasper 1999). This critique emphasizes strategic choice and interaction (Jasper 2011; Meyer and Staggenborg 2012), tactical innovation and adaptation (McAdam 1983), and the dynamics of contention (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

A third approach, the strategic-interaction perspective on movement outcomes, is emerging from this critique. It seeks to transcend the structure-agency dualism that has long dominated the study of movement outcomes. It proposes that resources and opportunities are important for explaining movement outcomes—not as explanatory factors in and of themselves, but in how they are reflexively and strategically used and played out in the interaction between challengers and targets. For example, choices about which tactics to use, what claims to make, which targets and alliances to select, and when to act are strategic in the sense that they are made in anticipation of their intended contribution to the realization of some objective, and even anticipate the reactions of others (Jasper 2004). Such choices can be made prior to the staging of protest, reflecting the movement's capabilities, preferences, and previous experiences, but the unfolding of events during the protest is likely to be somewhat unpredictable and therefore the choices may be altered. Such choices are interrelated (Meyer and Staggenborg 2012), not only among themselves, but also with the responses and actions of other agents in and around protest (Jasper 2011). In this sense, movement actors are reflective (Schön 1983) as their choices for tactics, claims, targets, alliances, timing, etc., are embedded in their previous capabilities and experiences, in their ambition of realizing some objective, and in the unfolding of events during the staging of protest.

Movement outcomes are hence viewed as discrete stages in an ongoing strategic interaction. This may help explain why they are often temporary and transient: they emerge from multiple actions, reactions, and contingencies during the protest, and further actions and reactions and changing contingencies may compromise previous gains. From this perspective, some of the problems with the attribution of causality and with spuriousness in explaining outcomes (Earl 2000) can be seen as a consequence of seeking causality in factors related to resources and opportunities.

Of course, our analysis of the UA system is not going to end the ongoing debate on how to explain movement outcomes. However, our analysis does contribute to this debate by showing how one set of social movement actors—the CCC International Secretariat and the various CCC country branches—has reflexively and strategically operated and interacted with allies and targets in developing and deploying one particular strategy to improve working conditions for garment workers: the UA system. We explore whether and how reflexivity, strategic choice, and interaction are associated with movement outcomes.

## **RESEARCH APPROACH**

The UA database was designed for the purposes of internal coordination and communication between the CCC International Secretariat and the various CCC country branches. It is accessible to all CCC staff working on urgent appeals, both at the CCC IS and at country branches, but only those who are assigned a coordinator role on specific cases can upload information and only on the cases for which they are responsible. According to a CCC spokesperson, the intention of this routine is to enhance reliability of data. The information in the database is factual: most of the data are statements about what actually happened during a case, including the dates of the events during the case. Some are notes, intentions, or considerations about what might be done at later stages in the development of a case, but the distinction between facts and intentions is always unambiguous.

There is, however, variation in the amount and detail of information across UA cases. This may be attributed to the occasional frenzy of the work: time pressure and high workloads may have affected how timely and with how much detail the information on specific cases was uploaded. Yet, given the prominent role that the local workers and their representatives play in the specific cases—e.g., in deciding to make cases public, in further pursuing cases—we expect that there is little difference in interpretation of case

events and their outcomes between CCC staff and the workers. Therefore, we consider the information that is available to be relatively trustworthy.

The UA database comprises information on 335 cases from January 1, 1999—the start of the database—until October 2010. Each year, approximately 20 to 35 UA requests were adopted and 10 to 15 cases closed. For 161 UA cases, a closure date could be established. For the vast majority of the remaining cases, no outcome could be established. This problem of right censoring in the data is a limitation to our analysis but cannot be resolved as long as new UA cases are being taken up. There are further limitations to our data, which we detail below. However, rather than dismissing our analysis on these grounds, one may also appreciate the data that are available.

In preparing the data for analysis, we routinely looked for additional information on UA cases by consulting the public CCC website as well as the CCC email archive, which contains up to hundreds of emails per urgent appeal and includes reports of communication with companies, allies in production countries, CCC urgent appeal coordinators, and other labor rights organizations involved in particular cases. The information found there was used in building up our database. Next, we held over a dozen informal interviews and discussions with three CCC urgent appeal coordinators, not only to better understand the UA system, but also to facilitate our data interpretation and analysis. We took extensive notes of these interviews and discussions and reviewed them during the analysis. Where deemed appropriate, we refer to these interviews and discussions and refer to the source as a “CCC spokesperson.” Finally, we comparatively scrutinized the UA cases in the database in order to better understand the meaning and context of particular decisions and their consequences.

Our analysis of these data combines qualitative content analysis of individual UA cases with a statistical analysis of those case characteristics that could be meaningfully coded in relation to reflexivity and strategic choice on the part of CCC, and in relation to the interactions between the various actors involved. Table 2 captures the information that we retained for our statistical analysis. The information in some fields of the UA database could be coded in a straightforward manner, such as COUNTRY. Other pieces of relevant information were captured from several fields, such as TARGET—which lists the proxy targets in a specific urgent appeal. Some variables were calculated or coded from other variables. For example, DURATION—how long a UA case remained open—was calculated from DATE RECEIVED and DATE OF CLOSURE. In addition, we used

data relating to the level of political rights and civil liberties for the country concerned in the year that the UA requests were made, to serve as a rough indicator of the difficulties of staging labor protests. To preserve the readability of the paper, we provide further information on specific variables later in the text when we feel this to be appropriate.

### **MANAGING URGENT APPEALS: REFLEXIVITY AND STRATEGIC CHOICE**

The first urgent appeal was organized in 1996 (Sluiter 2009: 64-65). Since the late 1990s, when the CCC hired its first UA coordinator, urgent appeals have been used on a regular basis

Table 2 Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>ID</i>	Case identification number	N=335 cases
<i>Date Received</i>	Identifies when a UA case started	N=331 cases, mean=28/year
<i>Date of closure</i>	Identifies when a UA case was closed	N=161 cases
<i>Duration</i>	Identifies how long a UA case was open	N=161 cases (105 were closed within a year from DATE RECEIVED; the shortest lasted 4 days, the longest 6 years and 51 days)
<i>Country</i>	Identifies from which country a UA case was initiated	N=330 cases, N=38 countries
<i>Key issue</i>	Identifies which is the key violation at stake	N=325, see table 3
<i>Focus</i>	Identifies whether key issue in a UA is factory-focused or state-focused	N=325 cases (factory-focused – 268, state-focused – 53, other – 4)
<i>Target</i>	Identifies number and types of proxy targets per UA	N=198 cases with proxy targets (N=741 proxy targets; N=270 unique targets: brands and retailers – 226, governmental bodies – 33, other – 11)
<i>Multifaceted</i>	Identifies which types of proxy targets are addressed per UA	N=198 cases (multifaceted – 77, non-multifaceted – 121)
<i>Frequency</i>	Identifies the number of UAs in which a proxy target had been involved with prior to a particular UA	N=270 unique proxy targets (highest number of UAs proxy target had previously been involved with – 24)
<i>Public</i>	Identifies whether or not a UA case is made public	N=150 cases (made public – 112, not made public – 38)
<i>Minimal work</i>	Identifies whether the CCC actively worked on a UA	N=335 cases (minimal work – 125, actively worked upon – 210)
<i>Outcome</i>	Identifies outcome of a UA	N=163 cases (successful – 67, partly successful – 51, unsuccessful – 45)
<i>Civil Liberties</i>	Identifies the level of civil liberties per country per year	N=155 cases for which an outcome could be established (rank score: 1 – highest, 7 – lowest)
<i>Political Rights</i>	Identifies the level of civil liberties per country per year	N=155 cases for which an outcome could be established (rank score: 1 – highest, 7 – lowest)

(Dent 2005: 13). The decision in early 1999 to develop a database of all the urgent appeals it has taken up indicates that the CCC had come to view the UA system as a valuable strategy in its struggle for improving the labor conditions of garment workers.

Building on the suggestion by Rojas, M'Zali, Turcotte, and Merrigan (2009) that proficiency with a particular strategy is a relevant factor in explaining outcomes, it might be expected that the CCC has attempted to learn from previous experiences and to increase the level of success for garment workers. Most of these attempts to learn are based on reflexivity (Schön 1983): choice in how to proceed in specific cases is based on deliberation, taking into account the specific context and particularities of the case at hand, as well as the retained experiences of previous cases (Dent 2005: 65). The commissioning by the CCC of the Dent (2005) study was a rare case of an explicit attempt to systematically evaluate and learn from the experiences so far. Strategic choice and reflexivity in the management of the UA system becomes evident in how the CCC handles UA requests: in deciding whether or not to take up the request, in allocating organizational capacity to UA work, and in targeting choices. Each will be addressed in turn.

### *Selection of UA Requests*

Of the 50 to 60 UA requests CCC received each year, 25 to 40 are rejected and are, therefore, not represented in the database. Thus, we had to rely on secondary data and interviews with CCC staff to understand why the CCC adopts or rejects UA requests. Several of those reasons are unlikely to affect chance of a successful outcome for workers. For example, UA requests from Latin America are routinely passed on to the Canada-based Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), the CCC's counterpart in North America. This division of labor is intended to maintain a stronger link between production and consumption: most apparel imports into Europe originate from South and Southeast Asia (Sluiter 2009: 120). Other UA requests are rejected because the demand is not in line with the CCC's mission to improve labor conditions and worker rights in the global apparel and sportswear industries (Merk 2009: 607). Whether the CCC has the capacity to take on another case is an important pragmatic factor, as UA requests are assessed in the order they are received.

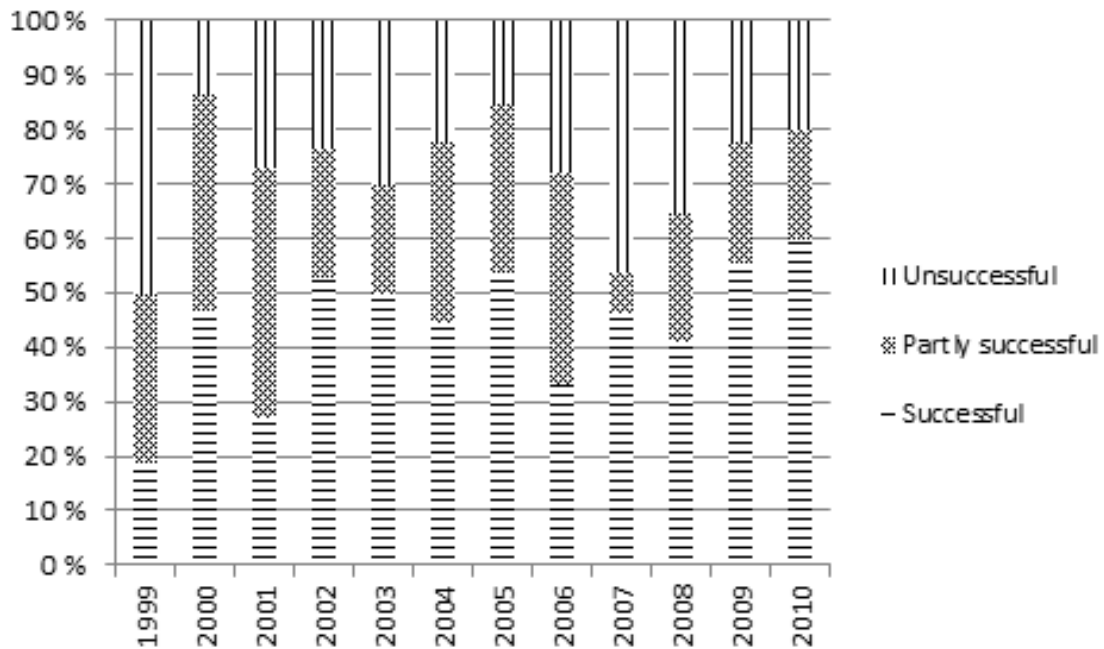
It is possible, however, that over time the CCC has improved its ex-ante expectation of case outcomes and has thereby enhanced its ability to reject UA requests with little chance of a successful outcome for garment workers. Our discussions with CCC staff suggests that the likelihood of a request being adopted increases if a large, well-known brand or retailer is involved that is based in one of the countries where the CCC is established. It is also more likely to go ahead if the request is supported by a union or



NGO with whom productive working relationships had previously been established. Further, some requests are not taken up by the CCC when the reported labor abuse cannot be verified, when there is “no convincing case to fight for” (CCC spokesperson). It is thus possible that the number of successful outcomes increases over time, as preference in their selection may have been given to UA requests that are perceived to more likely result in a positive outcome. Nevertheless, it was pointed out by a CCC spokesperson that, even if deemed to have little chance of success, some UA requests were still taken up for other reasons, including awareness raising among the CCC constituency and importance for local partners (cf. Rowley and Moldoveanu 2003). This latter point, as well as some considerations described later in the paper, may attenuate the potential bias in the selection of UA requests by the CCC.

### *UA Outcomes*

We used our data to verify whether or not urgent appeal outcomes have indeed become more favorable for garment workers over time. We followed Dent (2005) in coding UA outcomes on an ordinal scale of three values: successful, partly successful, and unsuccessful (cf. advantages, Gamson 1975). Coding decisions were based on our assessment of the extent to which the demands made in an urgent appeal have been met. The intermediate level of partly successful urgent appeals increases the sensitivity of the measure. It captures the different levels on the acceptance scale that the workers occupy. In unsuccessful urgent appeals, the proxy or ultimate target remains largely unresponsive to the request—they do not accept the activist coalition behind the request as a legitimate claimant—and no advantages for the garment workers are obtained. In partially successful cases, the targets are responsive but limited advantages for the garment workers are obtained. Level of success is thus defined in relation to the demands in the UA request. When in doubt about whether the original demands were met, we followed the decisions of the workers as captured in our data. If it appeared that they were satisfied with the outcome—e.g., because their working conditions were improved or because they willingly signed an agreement and trusted that the terms would be respected—we considered the UA outcome to be successful. However, some agreements remained empty promises, or were only partially implemented. We considered the outcomes of such cases to be partly successful or unsuccessful, depending on whether some or no improvements in working conditions were achieved.



**Figure 3 Share of Urgent Appeal Success at Uptake**

Notes: The solid lines capture the upper and lower limits of the range of successfully concluded urgent appeals. N=163.

UA cases are typically closed when it is decided that no further improvements can be obtained. Once a case is closed, no further information is added to the database. It might be inferred from the lack of renewed cases—i.e., an urgent appeal with the same ultimate target and the same labor issue—that outcomes are relatively durable and stable. If, for example, a previously established agreement is compromised after some time, CCC staff suggested that the workers' representatives would renew their contact with the CCC, and a new urgent appeal would be made. This was observed once in our dataset.

Figure 3 presents the relative share of successful, partially successful, and unsuccessful outcomes. It suggests that the range in the share of successful outcomes increased slightly over time, but the increase is not statistically significant. Because there is no information in the database about cases that are not taken up, further research into the selection process would be highly instructive.

### *Organizational Capacity*

Having taken up a request, the CCC varies in the amount of effort it puts into the cases. In reviewing the database, we noticed that 125 cases had little or no CCC activity associated with them. They are minimal work cases on which there is very little information: usually there is no closure date and no information on movement activity. Information about the outcome was recorded in only 22 of the 125 minimal work cases. In some of these cases, CCC activity only consisted of signing a protest letter drafted and sent out by another organization. In a larger number of minimal work cases, however, there was little activity at the factory level; in these cases, the workers were apparently insufficiently organized, or too repressed, to be able to continue the effort. Some UA requests from Latin America became minimal work cases when the CCC handed over the case to MSN after having recorded them in the database.

Until 2005, 40-60 percent of the urgent appeals were minimal work cases. This rate dropped to less than 10 percent after 2007. A CCC spokesperson indicated that, following a recommendation from an internal evaluation (Dent 2005), the CCC became more restrictive in taking up UA requests. Simultaneously, more resources were made available for UA work; consequently, more work could be spent on cases that would have previously received only minimal work. This resulted in a more concentrated effort on the cases that were accepted. It may thus be expected that minimal work cases are associated with less positive outcomes for garment workers. But our data show that there is no significant difference in the outcomes for workers between minimal versus non-minimal work cases (Spearman  $\rho=0.050$ ,  $p=0.265$  single tailed,  $N=163$ ). This result is not entirely unexpected if one considers that other activist groups in the movement may have spent much more time and energy on these cases than the CCC.

### *Choice of Targets*

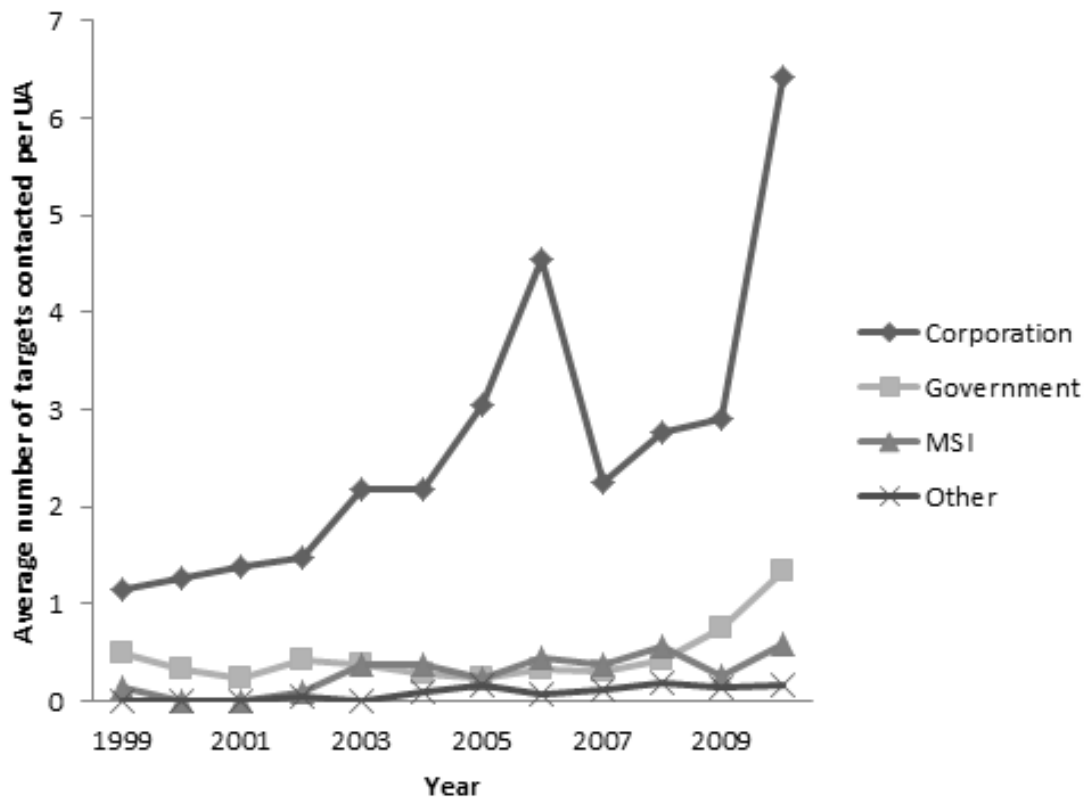
Once a request is taken up, the choice of targets is a third element through which CCC may influence case outcomes. Obviously, the choice is restricted to those firms and authorities that have a relationship with the factory. Among the non-minimal work cases, proxy targets could be identified in 198 urgent appeals (92 percent). Figure 4 shows an increase in the average number of proxy targets per case. The relative share of multifaceted urgent appeals—i.e., cases in which more than one type of proxy target was addressed—also increased (from 15-20 percent before 2003 to 30-40 percent after 2003). At the same time that the CCC took on fewer UA requests, it increased its effort

per urgent appeal. The increase in effort seems to follow another recommendation by Dent (2005) that increasing the number of, and diversity in, proxy targets would increase the chances of success. The appearance of multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) as proxy targets can be related to the increasing numbers of MSIs and the larger numbers of brands and retailers that have associated themselves with these MSIs.

The choice of how many and which proxy targets to include may affect the level of pressure on the local factory as it potentially enlarges the circle of critics. If local conflict resolution is blocked, the boomerang model of proxy targeting might provide an alternative route for workers to resolve their cases, and targeting more brands and retailers makes sense to the extent that it increases the odds of at least one of the targets exerting pressure on the local factory. Dent (2005: 44) describes how local factory management might be more inclined to concede in response to joint action by multiple buyers than to the complaints of a single buyer, and hence advises the CCC to approach more proxy targets per urgent appeal.

If different types of proxy targets are approached, the local factory might experience a greater diversity in the sources of pressure for change. For example, MSIs are created with the purpose of strengthening brands' corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. The CCC believes MSIs can help their cause (Sluiter 2009: 153). If firms who are members of an MSI do indeed attach greater importance to CSR, it should follow that they will contribute more to the successful outcome of urgent appeals than firms that are not. If the MSI in question is contacted for the urgent appeal, this should further encourage these firms. Including an MSI as a proxy target may also facilitate the dissemination of the urgent appeal once it is made

public, through the antisweatshop NGOs that are associated with the MSI. Further, governments, brands and retailers, and MSIs can influence one another. For example, corporations might put pressure on a government to implement tougher labor standards. Dent (2005: 64-67) recommends approaching different kinds of proxy targets for UA work, and governments in particular. Thus, addressing a larger number of proxy targets, as well as addressing different types of targets, can be expected to increase the chances of success, yet there appears to be no association between number of targets and outcome (Kendall  $\tau = -0.017$ ,  $p = .790$ ,  $N = 163$ ).



**Figure 4 Average Number of Proxy Targets per UA, for Actively Worked-upon Cases**

Notes: N = 210.

The inconclusiveness of the result is probably related to incomplete information on the number of proxy targets per urgent appeal. For example, in the British-Thai Synthetic Textile Company case, three proxy targets were mentioned by name, whereas the number of brands that were actually addressed was larger; how many, and which, was not apparent from the database. This may have been the case in other urgent appeals, too. In other instances, the local factory is an exclusive producer for one or a few brands or retailers; in such cases there is only a limited number of potential proxy targets. Here, the power balance between the local factory and the proxy target is likely to favor the latter, because typically the brand has greater bargaining power than the factory. Therefore, the ratio between the number of proxy targets in an urgent appeal and the total number of brands and retailers that the local factory supplies might be a better measure (Locke et al. 2007). However, there was no information available on how many brands and retailers are supplied by the local factories. With increased transparency on the precise supply relationships in the industry, such an analysis might become feasible in the future.

Multifaceted urgent appeals are associated with slightly less successful outcomes for workers than urgent appeals in which only one type of proxy target is addressed, but not significantly so (Spearman  $\rho=-0.065$ ,  $p=.206$  single tailed,  $N=163$ ). In a finer breakdown, however, it appears that urgent appeals in which governments are targeted are associated with less success than those in which governments are not targeted ( $\beta=-0.849$ ,  $p=.012$ ,  $N=163$ ). This finding is discussed later.

The discussion above suggests that the CCC has strategically and reflexively made use of the UA system. The CCC can be seen as “a probing and flexible creature that is...innovative in continuously (or at least periodically) revising its strategies” (Lofland 1996: 282-83). It has internally evaluated the UA system, and subsequently concentrated its efforts by becoming more restrictive in taking up UA requests and increasing the number and type of proxy targets per urgent appeal.

## **INTERACTION WITH PROXY TARGETS**

A number of factors relating to the dynamics of interaction with proxy targets could be constructed from the data. Specifically, we had data on the duration of urgent appeals, on the level of previous experience of a proxy target with the UA system, and on whether or not the urgent appeal was made public.

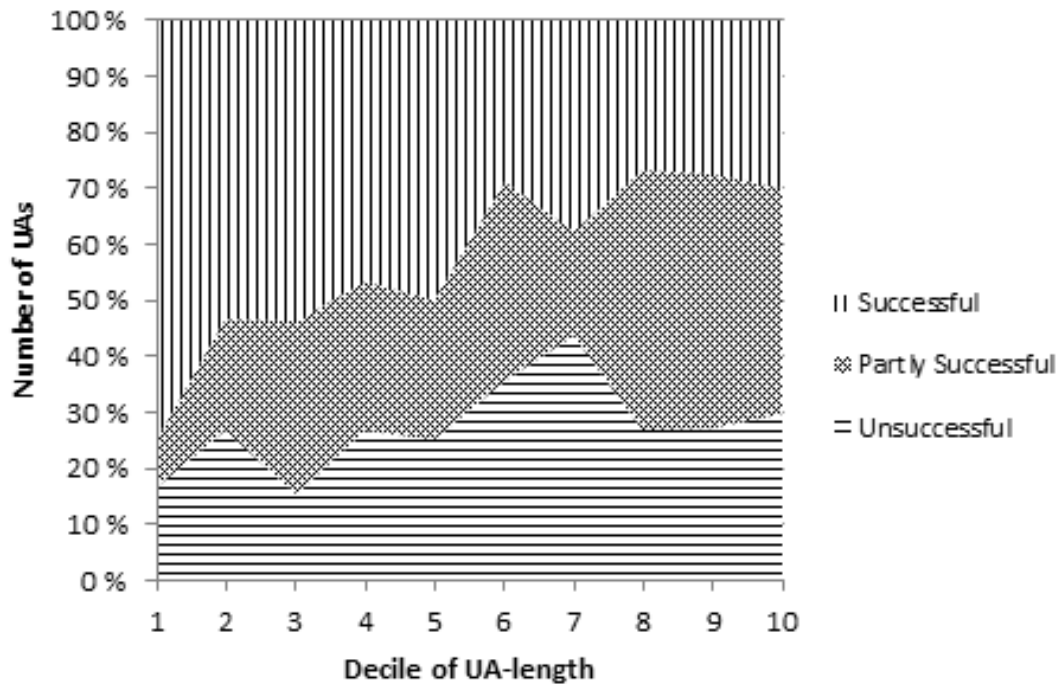
### *UA Duration*

Two-thirds of the urgent appeals are concluded within a year. Yet others can range from a couple of days or weeks to well over a year, or even two. Duration is a complex indicator of interaction, not only because of ambiguity around the date of closure, but also because of difficulties in interpreting duration. A longer duration may indicate that the CCC is continuing to pursue a case in which little progress is being made. However, it might also be the case that some urgent appeals drag on for a long time without much action taking place before they are finally closed. Some UA cases are concluded within a short period of time, but this does not indicate lack of effort. In an internal study of the UA system, it was advised that, rather than taking up more urgent appeals, the CCC should put more effort into following up new developments in ongoing UA cases, as sustaining them over a longer period of time would result in more successful outcomes (Dent 2005).

Are longer-running urgent appeals associated with more successful outcomes? The average duration is influenced by a relatively small number of very long-lasting urgent appeals. We therefore recoded the duration of urgent appeals—a ratio scale measured in days—into an ordinal scale of deciles. Figure 5 relates the relative duration of urgent appeals to their degree of success; it suggests that shorter urgent appeals are more successful (Spearman  $\rho=-0.218$ ,  $p=.011$  double tailed,  $N=137$ ). However, visual inspection of figure 5 also suggests that when urgent appeals run for longer periods of time, perseverance pays off, as the relative proportion of partially successful urgent appeals increases.

### *Target Experience*

Within the textile industry, brands and retailers only started to develop their CSR departments and policies in the mid to late 1990s. In 1991, Nike and Levi's were the first brands to adopt corporate codes of conduct on labor standards in their supply chains. Today, most well-known brands run large CSR departments, have joined MSIs, and often hire CSR staff in production countries (Locke, Qin, and Brause 2007). Over the period covered in this study, brands and retailers in the industry are assumed to have increasingly integrated their CSR policies into their strategic and operational decision making (Garriga and Melé 2004; Zadek 2004) or corporate governance procedures (McAteer and Pulver 2009). These changes would have enhanced their capacity to address the issues highlighted in urgent appeals, as they would have set up mechanisms to enforce the criteria contained within their corporate codes of conduct and would be adhering to the control and correction procedures implied in MSI standards. The MSI standards themselves have also been strengthened by increases in the number of independent external monitoring and surprise visits, and independent external verification (Connor 2008). But also, having been confronted previously with urgent appeals may have given them an impetus to strengthen their capacity to address the items highlighted in urgent appeals, as well as increased their understanding of how to handle labor disputes in the production chain (Dent 2005). Thus, brands and retailers that have been involved in a larger number of urgent appeal cases can be expected to be associated with increased levels of success for garment workers.



**Figure 5 Share of Urgent Appeal Success According to Duration**

Notes: The solid lines capture the trends between the categories of success. N=137.

We calculated how often brands and retailers were targeted in urgent appeals. The most frequently targeted brands are Nike (targeted 25 times), Gap (24), and H&M (21); taken together they represent 11.5 percent of the total corporate targets in urgent appeals. However, the association cannot be tested in a straightforward manner, because there are many cases in which multiple brands and retailers are targeted (figure 4). Typically, two to four brands and retailers are targeted; some of them are experiencing an urgent appeal for the first time, whilst others have had extensive previous experience. Having at least one proxy target involved with earlier urgent appeals might help assuage the anxieties of less experienced proxy targets and help them to overcome any reluctance to work on the case. This assumes, of course, that the multiple targets involved in a case do communicate and align their responses to the urgent appeal. A CCC spokesperson confirmed that in many urgent appeals there is contact among the proxy targets; sometimes they coordinate their responses, sometimes they argue about who is really responsible and who has the greatest leverage over the local management.

In order to circumvent these complexities, we tested for two associations. We calculated the average number of times that the corporate proxy targets in each urgent appeal had previously been contacted (average experience). This assumes that each proxy target



has a similar impact on the outcome. This is not necessarily the case. A CCC spokesperson indicated that some targets have a stronger influence on the outcome than others, and that targets get more involved in UA work when their experience with the CCC grows. In this sense, in any urgent appeal the target with the most experience may be expected to take the lead in responding to the issues raised, and to pull the other targets along in the process. Therefore, for each urgent appeal we also identified the proxy target that had been targeted most frequently before, and used that number as a proxy for experience (most experience).

Although both associations are significant (average experience: Spearman  $\rho=0.138$ ,  $p=.061$  single tailed,  $N=128$ ; most experience: Spearman  $\rho=0.160$ ,  $p=.036$  single tailed,  $N=128$ ), the latter association is stronger. Apparently, the most experienced targets are not unwilling to improve working conditions. If they were unwilling, no association would have been found; they would rather be looking for ways to render urgent appeals less effective (tactical adaptation, McAdam 1983)—for example, by supporting local management to increase its control over workers or insulate workers from their (inter)national contacts, or by adopting cut and run responses.

### *Going Public*

Nevertheless, targets may differ in their willingness to respond to the demands in urgent appeals. In situations of prolonged non-response or denial, the workers and their allies may seek to escalate the conflict (den Hond and de Bakker 2007). In the context of urgent appeals, to make the case public is perhaps the strongest move that can be made to escalate the conflict. By making an urgent appeal public, the CCC seeks to call into question the reputation of the brands and retailers involved. It is based on invoking the logic of numbers (della Porta and Diani 1999) and public arousal, as the CCC demands its constituency and supporters to write letters to the targets of the urgent appeal, and seeks media coverage of the case. The decision to make a case public is made jointly by the CCC and local workers and their representatives, as making the urgent appeal public may have severe repercussions for the workers. In some cases, such as in China, workers eventually opposed the idea of making the appeal public because of fear of repercussions (CCC spokesperson).

The analysis of the association between making an urgent appeal public and outcomes achieved suggests there is no difference in the level of outcome for public versus non-public urgent appeals (Spearman  $\rho=-0.064$ ,  $p=.506$  double tailed,  $N=111$ ). While this

result is inconclusive, it does not imply that making an urgent appeal public is not a meaningful step in the conflict. One can see an alternative explanation if one considers that the CCC will often confront the proxy target with the possibility of making the case public, prior to actually doing so. For some brands and retailers it might be that the act of going public is required for them to do anything at all. In such cases, additional pressure in the form of publicity might increase the chances of success. But for other brands and retailers the threat of negative publicity may be sufficient pressure. If the ploy works, the case can be satisfactorily resolved without having been made public. In this sense, the threat of action can be as effective as the action itself. If the ploy does not work, the case can be made public, and the resulting pressure may be a reason for brands and retailers to give in. It seems that both mechanisms are at work; threatening to make an urgent appeal public and making it public are both meaningful steps in attempting to resolve the conflict.

Obviously, we would have liked to include in our exploration some further details about the decision to make a case public, such as whether or not making a case public has actually been used as a threat by the CCC. Although the database contains some information about what happens behind the scenes, there is unfortunately no information on the use of threats of this kind in the CCC's communication with brands and retailers. Nevertheless, a CCC spokesperson says that "non-public, behind-the-scenes" work is part and parcel of the UA system, and the explicit reference to this in the UA flow chart (figure 1) suggests that the threat is often made.

It is also relevant to consider the amount of support that is garnered in urgent appeals once they are made public. While the effort to generate publicity is captured in the coding for making an urgent appeal public, the response it generates is more difficult to trace. Occasionally it is stated that a newspaper article or radio program has covered the case. In a limited number of cases from 2008 and onwards, some information is available on how much response has been generated: response rates include 40 to 90 signatures from street petitioning, almost 100 text messages in a specific case, and anywhere between 200 to over 6,000 protest emails having been sent in various cases. All in all, there is too little information available on how many individuals and organizations supported public UAs for a meaningful analysis. Nevertheless, a CCC spokesperson confirms that public support as such is more important than the amount of public support, because targets would find it difficult to assess whether or not a small response may develop into more substantial support. The CCC claims it does have a

reputation for being able to raise full-scale international campaigns, such that even a relatively small number of emails, letters, or text messages represent a serious threat to targets. Support might be included in follow-up studies if more extensive use will be made of online petitioning and social media in public UAs.

## **INTERACTION WITH WORKER REPRESENTATIVES**

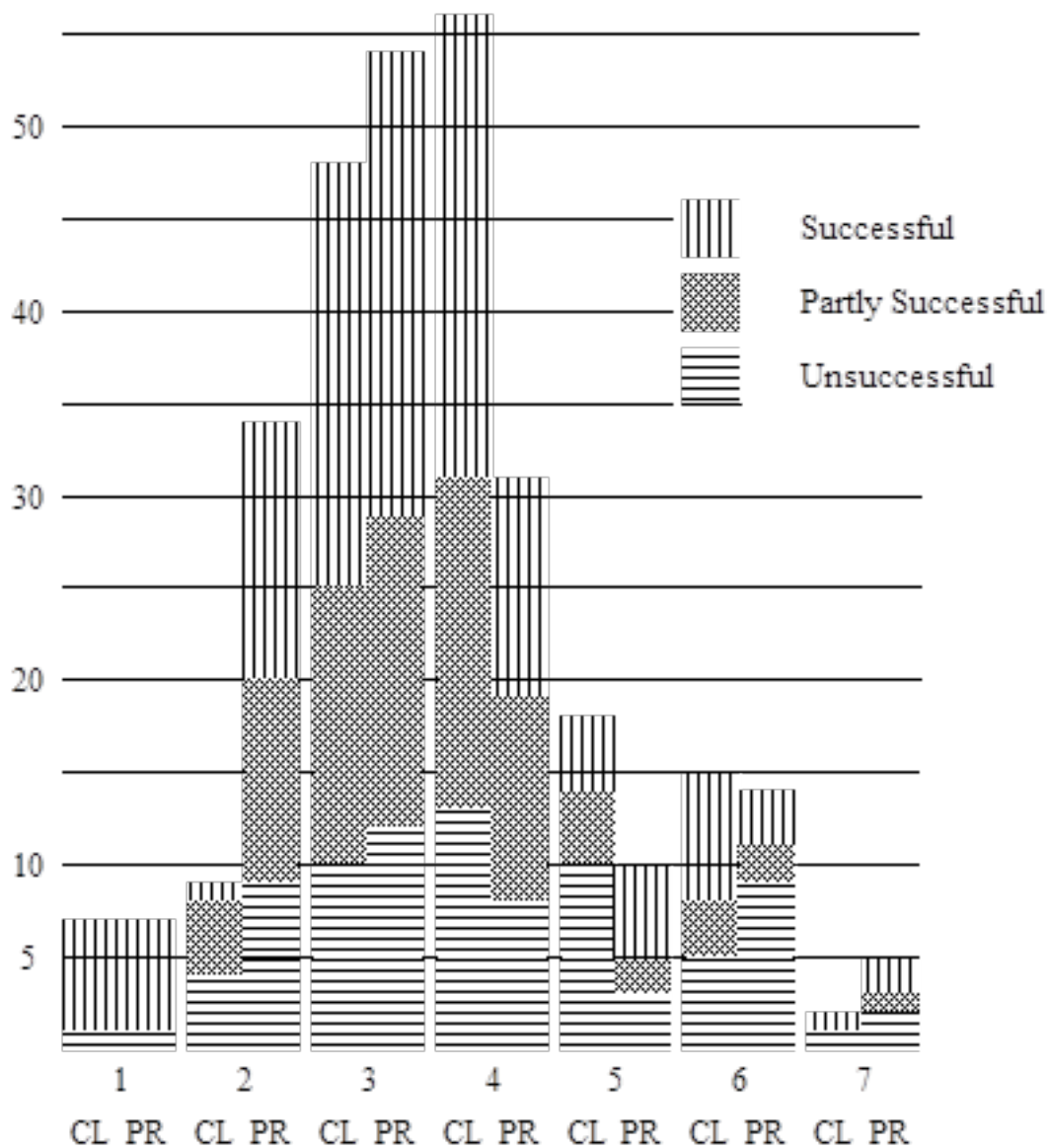
The literature on transnational activism suggests that the strength of transnational activist networks (TANs) is a critical factor in their ability to make things change (Keck and Sikkink 1989; McAteer and Pulver 2009). Recently, Kraemer, Whiteman, and Banerjee (2013) pointed out that national activist networks (NANs) are also highly important in this respect. NANs may be especially relevant in the case of urgent appeals, as the CCC prefers to take up requests that are supported by labor unions or NGOs. Country of origin may matter for the UA process, as the institutional context of countries makes for variation in the extent to which they allow labor unions or NGOs to operate. But it also begs the question of how the CCC helps TANs and NANs to form, to survive, or even to flourish, as the position of labor unions or NGOs in some countries is very weak.

### *Country of Origin*

We started addressing such issues by analyzing the countries of origin of the urgent appeals in the database. We recorded urgent appeals from 38 different countries, mostly in South and Southeast Asia. A third of the urgent appeals came from just two countries: Indonesia (63 urgent appeals) and Bangladesh (56). These two plus Cambodia (29), Thailand (27), Philippines (23), and India (22) account for two-thirds of all the urgent appeals in the database. There are few cases from countries such as China and Vietnam. There is no clear shift over time in the countries from which urgent appeals originate.

A cross-tabulation of country of origin and outcome suggests that there is a statistically significant country effect: urgent appeals from Thailand and Bangladesh are more likely to be settled successfully than those from other countries ( $p=.021$  double sided,  $N=149$ ). Apparently, labor conditions in these countries are such that the UA system is occasionally invoked; collective organization in the form of labor unions or NGOs is feasible, it can cross national boundaries, and a relatively large share of the urgent appeals are concluded successfully.

In order to explore these issues, we drew on the annual comparative survey of the civil liberties and political rights in countries compiled by the independent watchdog Freedom



**Figure 6** Number of Urgent Appeals versus Level of Civil Liberties and Political Rights in Country of Origin at Date Received.

Notes: CL=Civil Liberties, PR=Political Rights. Scores are ordinal: 1 – highest, 7 – lowest. N=155.

House. We linked UA cases to the rank score for the country in the year in which the urgent appeal was requested. We propose that civil liberties and political rights are proxy variables to capture the abstract notion of the relative openness of the

institutional system (McAdam 1996), interpreted as “which players are allowed to play in what arenas, according to official rules” (Jasper 2011: 21).

Figure 6 shows that most urgent appeals are from countries with modest levels of civil liberties and political rights (e.g., Philippines, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, as well as Bangladesh and Thailand for most of the years in the study). There are few urgent appeals from countries where levels of civil liberties and political rights are high (e.g., Australia, Canada, UK, Spain) or low (e.g., China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan, Tunisia, Morocco). This confirms the dual effect of restrictions in political rights and civil liberties on transnational activism: as political rights and civil liberties are increasingly restricted, there is an increased need for transnational activism, but the possibility to mobilize is reduced (Meyer 2004; Caraway 2006).

We further explore the associations between the outcome of urgent appeals and the level of political rights (PR) and civil liberties (CL) in the country of origin in the year the urgent appeals were requested. These associations were analyzed in ordinal regressions, and both are significant (CL:  $p=.103$ ,  $N=155$ ; PR:  $p=.012$ ,  $N=155$ ). However, the result may be subject to interaction; we therefore also analyzed the association simultaneously and political rights appear to be more strongly associated with successful outcomes than civil liberties (CL:  $p=.347$ ,  $N=155$ ; PR:  $p=.039$ ,  $N=155$ ). The difference between the two proxies might be understood as follows: Civil liberties refer broadly to tools available for collective action; in many instances what is at stake is gaining the right to unionize (freedom of association), something that is restricted in countries with moderate or low levels of civil liberties. Political rights refer to the level of inclusion of citizens in political processes; in countries with moderate levels of political rights there are some legal rights for (labor) protest. Our result is a partial confirmation of Locke et al.’s (2007) finding that their proxy measure of political opportunities—Kaufman’s “rule of law” index—was associated with increased supplier compliance to Nike’s requirements regarding labor-management practices and working conditions at the factories.

### *Network Strength*

So how, then, are the strength and cohesiveness of the transnational activists’ network ties with the CCC established and secured? How are workers and their representatives able to find their way to the CCC? As is a common practice in forming and strengthening TANs (Keck and Sikkink 1998), the “CCC in particular has used

conferences, meetings and publications to work toward a shared understanding of campaign goals among unions and non-government organizations in Europe, North America, Africa, Latin America, Asia and Australia” (Connor 2008: 143). For example, one such meeting in 2010 in Turkey involved 230 partners from 51 countries. The CCC also extends its networks by organizing visits in production countries (CCC spokesperson). These visits are designed to allow CCC representatives to meet with labor organizations. During such visits, information is exchanged, the work of the CCC and the UA system is introduced, and the possibility for collaboration is explored. It may happen also that worker groups hear about the CCC or the UA system through their own networks and decide to contact the CCC, either directly or through an intermediary organization. Finally, the CCC may learn about issues through mass media, such as in cases of factory fire or when protesters are tried in a court, and contact local groups to offer support. Over time, the CCC has thus built up long-lasting relationships with several national and international organizations, campaigns, and networks.

One might expect that the CCC would adopt a different approach to involving and maintaining relationships with groups from countries with differing levels of civil liberties and political rights, precisely because of the differences in opportunity and risk involved in collective action and mobilization. However, a CCC spokesperson suggested that this is not the case. It is decidedly easier to create and maintain a TAN when levels of civil liberties and political rights are higher, but the approach is similar, if only pursued with more caution, in countries where civil liberties and political rights are at lower levels.

When such relationships between the CCC and local workers (and their representatives) improve and get stronger, information exchange becomes more efficient and effective. It may be expected that this, in turn, improves the prospect of positive outcomes for garment workers. Evidence from the database confirms this expectation. For example, among the local organizations issuing UA requests, one was involved in 20 urgent appeals at different factories, by far the largest number for any such local organization. Our data suggest that the later UA requests involving this organization are associated with a higher level of success than the earlier UA requests.

On the other hand, an urgent appeal from Tunisia suggests that disruption of communication between the workers and the CCC can frustrate the CCC’s efforts to provide support. The case was about factory closure and replacement, involving

workers being dismissed and then rehired on worse terms of payment. After the labor union had staged protests, including worker sit-ins and strikes, for a period of three years, it contacted the CCC, which adopted the UA request. However, support by the CCC was blocked because, according to a CCC spokesperson, the communication facilities had been “pirated” by the Tunisian police, making it impossible for the CCC to efficiently follow up on the case. Nevertheless, the case was concluded with partial success for the workers, as they eventually obtained some compensation.

It thus appears that stronger relationships between the CCC and local unions and NGOs are associated with more successful outcomes for garment workers. However, the association is not obvious, and its strength may diminish over time. A CCC spokesperson suggested that local partner organizations have already started to contact brands and retailers themselves, without resorting to the UA system. Previous international recognition, such as from the CCC, may have bolstered their position and enabled them to be recognized as legitimate claimants. A growing awareness among the local management of the possible impact of UA work may mean there is less need for them to mobilize their transnational activist network. This in turn may lead to a change in the set of conflicts for which support is sought from the CCC: the easier cases that local unions and NGOs can resolve themselves are less likely to be put forward to the CCC.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the collection of urgent appeals in the database may not be fully representative of the entire set of labor conflicts. Most cases originate from countries with moderate levels of civil liberties and political rights. Cases from countries with more political rights appear to be associated with more successful outcomes for garment workers. Arguably, issues that underlie protest are more likely to be discussed in situations where labor protest is considered to be legitimate than in contexts in which it is not. Hence, protest can have more successful outcomes for garment workers in these situations. In this light, the fact that workers from countries with low levels of civil liberties and political rights are managing to seek international support through UA requests and to sustain their protests over time—e.g., in the face of real or potential further repression and retaliation (Soule 2012)—can itself be regarded as quite an accomplishment.

## **INTERACTION BETWEEN WORKERS AND ULTIMATE TARGETS**

From the CCC's perspective, urgent appeals may be relatively individual and discrete events; they come in on a particular date and—if adopted—are closed after a period of time. Yet, for the workers and their representatives, the act of seeking transnational support is a significant move in a longer sequence of conflict. However, there is only anecdotal evidence on the local labor conflicts. It is not possible to use this database to systematically assess which types of conflicts transnational support is demanded, at which stages in the evolution of a conflict it is demanded, or to what extent recourse to the UA system itself is used as a credible threat in the local conflict. Next, we present some evidence on the history of the local conflict prior to seeking transnational support. We also discuss which issues are central in the urgent appeals.

In the Tunisian case mentioned above, there was a lead time of three years between the start of the conflict and the date that the UA request was recorded in the database. This may appear to be a long period of time, but it is not uncommon, as two further examples from the CCC UA database suggest.

In a Bangladesh factory, in September 2006, a conflict arose between the workers and the local management, which was resolved with the signing of an agreement on wages, holidays, bonuses, dismissals and working hours. However, the terms of the agreement were never implemented. In February 2009, another conflict arose when the local management tried to force the workers to sign a circular that was contrary to the country's labor legislation and the terms of the 2006 agreement. The local management also decided to lower salaries. When the workers protested, management started threatening them with armed 'goons', sent to the homes of the workers. Abusive dismissals also took place. The CCC received an UA request in June 2009.

In June 2006, a local union at Mink Tekstil—associated to the Turkish national union federation TEKSIF—received authorization to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement for the 120 workers in the factory. This provoked a huge campaign against the union by the local management. As a result, some workers resigned from the union when they observed that union members were being dismissed. During the months of June and July 2006, TEKSIF filed court cases for 52 illegally dismissed workers. In a series of decisions in February-March 2008, the High Court of Appeal eventually ruled that 49 workers be reinstated and three workers compensated. In March 2008, the CCC received an UA request, because the management had not implemented the Court's decisions.

In these cases, there was a lead time of two to three years. In other instances, typical lead times were a few days or weeks in cases of accidents (factory fires) or simple worker dismissals, or six to twelve months in cases of union repression. All these examples suggest that, in many cases, when a request for support is sent out to the CCC, an organized group of workers is engaged in a head-on conflict with local management and there is little prospect of resolution. We suggest that conflicts that generate urgent appeals are more difficult to resolve than most labor disputes, and that they typically involve a more organized labor force.



### *Key Issue*

The nature of the issue at stake is an important aspect of any UA request; it is carefully reported in the database, as it is the basis for the formulation of the demand(s) in an urgent appeal. Urgent appeals cover a wide variety of issues, such as factory fires, activist imprisonment, worker dismissal, and forced labor. Many urgent appeals concern more than one issue, but we consider the key issue to be the one that is most central in the demands of the UA request. For example, in one case in Cambodia, physical violence was used against workers in the context of union repression, so the key issue was coded as union repression. Table 3 summarizes the frequency of occurrence of key issues in urgent appeals. Cross-tabulation of key issues with outcomes indicates that there is no difference in the success rates associated with these key issues.

Closer inspection of the key issues suggests that some relate to the factory and its management, such as worker dismissals, infringements of labor rights, factory closures and union repression. Others, such as imprisonment of workers, demands for labor laws, murder, and harassment of labor activists, occur outside the factory and, one way or another, involve the state. We accordingly recoded the key issues into two broad categories: factory-focused and state-focused.

Factory-focused appeals appear to be associated with more successful outcomes for workers than state-focused urgent appeals ( $\beta=0.689$ ,  $p=.079$  double tailed,  $N=163$ ). On the basis of this finding it might be suggested that the UA system is more effective in pure corporate boomerang models, as both the cause of the underlying conflict and the possibility of remedying it are contained within a particular buyer-supplier relationship. However, once the underlying conflict extends beyond a particular factory, the causes are likely to be broader and more systemic, and hence more difficult to redress. For example, it might be expected that harassment of labor activists outside the production facility can only continue to take place if local authorities such as police forces are implicated in the conflict.

**Table 3 Key Issues in Urgent Appeals**

	<b>Key Issue</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<i>Factory-focused</i>	Worker dismissal	123	37.8
	Infringement of labor rights	55	16.9
	Factory closure	45	13.8
	Union repression	29	8.9
	Factory fire	15	4.6
	Forced labor	1	0.3
<i>State-focused</i>	Demands for labor laws	20	6.2
	Imprisonment	16	4.9
	Murder	9	2.8
	Harassment of labor activist	8	2.5
<i>Other</i>		4	1.2

Note: N=325

## DISCUSSION

The paper set out to describe and explore the CCC UA system as a specific strategy for improving labor conditions in the garment industry that is not well understood in literature, and to analyze outcomes of its use for garment workers. Although the evidence is not very strong, it can be suggested that the success rate of urgent appeals has increased slightly over time (figure 3). Table 4 summarizes our findings. Below, we discuss those results that merit further reflection.

As greater diversity in proxy targets increases pressure and might therefore be expected to be associated with more successful outcomes, we find it intriguing that urgent appeals in which government is included among the proxy targets are in fact associated with less successful outcomes. It may be explained in the light of our other findings that state-focused urgent appeals and urgent appeals from countries with lower levels of political rights are associated with less successful outcomes. These factors could be related in the sense that appeals from countries with lower levels of political rights (score on political rights of 5-7, t-test) are more often state-focused ( $p=.051$ , equal variances not assumed): government authorities are therefore included as a proxy target because they are implicated in the conflict. In these countries, the root causes of exploitative labor conditions in global garment production networks are sustained by a lack of labor regulations or suppression of collective action. Hence, protest is not just against substandard labor conditions at the factory itself, but it may also challenge the political context in which these labor conditions can persist. Sometimes, in such

circumstances, protest may sow the seeds of long-term structural change, as the outcome of the Stella International case in China, 2004 suggests. In this case, an earlier sentence on the workers, who had been involved in mass protests against bad working conditions at two of Stella's factories, was reversed at an appeal court. The urgent appeal may well have contributed to this outcome. The court decision was heralded as a “significant landmark in the history of the modern labour movement in China” and as “a milestone on the journey towards workers' rights in China” (CCC 2005).

Our next finding is paradoxical: the outcome is more successful for garment workers if corporate proxy targets have greater previous experience with urgent appeals. Having more previous experience implies that the corporate proxy target is a repeat offender, but the most frequently targeted brands and corporations are also the ones that have developed the most extensive policies and practices to redress the issues underlying UA requests. This is consistent with Barrientos and Smith's (2007) findings on the limited impact of corporate codes of conduct on workers, and those by Locke et al. (2007) on the limited impact of Nike's CSR practices on its suppliers. It is worth exploring further why these brands and retailers are repeat offenders. Apparently they have a capacity for dealing with violations of labor rights when these are brought to light, but have been less successful than one might expect in addressing the root causes of the violations, as a genuine attempt to implement policies and practices to redress the issues underlying UA requests would result in fewer labor rights abuses at their suppliers and hence fewer UA requests involving their suppliers. That this is not the case may be indicative of the difficulties that Nike and similar companies face in implementing their policies; for instance, suppliers may produce for multiple brands and retailers, and contact between supplier and brand is more often through the brand's operational management than through its CSR staff. In consequence, production demands may get higher priority than labor rights (Connor 2008). Even if it is the case that there is a selection bias in our study, these corporations are still repeat offenders and the finding remains paradoxical.

Finally, the finding that there is no difference in the outcome between urgent appeals that have been made public and those that have not is a reminder of the importance of tactics used “behind closed doors” (den Hond and de Bakker 2007). In this case, the threat—unobserved—by the CCC to make an urgent appeal public is a step in the escalation of the conflict that is distinct from that of actually making the urgent appeal public—which is observed. Making an urgent appeal public can indicate that previous

negotiations have been unsuccessful, and can also be seen as a lever to apply further pressure to an unwilling corporate proxy target. The nature of this choice is such that it cannot be used as a straightforward predictor of outcome. This is similar to, for example, shareholder resolutions. Withdrawal of a shareholder resolution should be seen as an indicator of activist success, since management apparently has made sufficient concessions to satisfy the filers of the proposal (Proffitt and Spicer 2006; Rojas et al. 2009).

**Table 4 Summary of Results**

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**CCC Reflexivity and Choice**

Effects from case selection could not be tested

No difference between minimal and non-minimal work cases

No association with number of proxy targets per UA

- \*\* Among proxy-targeted UAs, inclusion of government as a proxy target is associated with less successful outcomes

**Interaction with Proxy Targets**

- \*\* UAs with shorter duration are associated with more successful outcomes

- \* UAs with longer duration have increased chances of partially successful outcomes

- \*\* Among proxy-targeted UAs, a higher level of target experience with previous UAs is associated with more successful outcomes

No difference between UAs made public versus not made public

**Interaction with Workers**

UAs from countries with more civil liberties are not associated with more successful outcomes

- \*\* UAs from countries with more political rights are associated with more successful outcomes

- \* Strength of relationship with CCC is associated with more successful outcomes

**Interaction between Workers and Ultimate Targets**

- \*\* UAs around key issues that are factory-focused are associated with slightly more successful outcomes than those that are state-focused

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Notes: \* = qualitative support for the association, \*\* = statistically significant support for the association

## CONCLUSION

The paper makes three contributions. First, it details the CCC UA system, a prominent example of a strategy that has also been pursued by other social movement organizations in the antisweatshop and human rights movements. Second, the paper explores the outcomes of urgent appeals for garment workers. We discussed our findings in the previous section. Third, the paper shows that, over time, the CCC has adjusted how it deals with the flow of UA requests by dedicating more resources and staff time to urgent appeals, and by reflecting on experience and evaluations and thereby attempting to improve the handling of urgent appeals—for example, by becoming more selective in which UA requests it takes up. Taken together, we suggest that reflexivity in the use of this particular strategy, strategic choice in its implementation, and interaction with allies and targets are all relevant for understanding outcomes for garment workers, which highlights the relevance of a “strategic-interaction” perspective on movement outcomes.

The results of this exploration complement the findings of some of the more case-based and historical studies of antisweatshop activism. Carty (2006: 220) attests to the successes obtained in conflicts at two Mexican factories, Kukdong and Duro, although they were “not solved easily or quickly.” Armbruster-Sandoval (2004: 139) interprets the outcomes of the four case studies that he collected in several Central American countries as “short-term victories/long-term defeats,” thereby pointing out the difficulty in sustaining any concessions gained in these conflicts. Jeff Ballinger, in the very start of the antisweatshop movement, with his publications on Nike subcontractor factories in Indonesia in the late 1980s, is quoted as saying: “There has been tremendous accomplishment in consciousness raising on the issue of sweatshops since the mid-1990s.... In terms of victories, however, I think we have come up nearly empty-handed in terms of demonstrable gains for workers” (Danaher and Mark 2003: 67). The focus in these and other studies is on the larger campaigns. The analysis of urgent appeals enabled us to focus on the micro-struggles that are part and parcel of the overall struggle for labor rights. The length of some of the urgent appeals, and the relative inconclusiveness of the findings of this study, confirm the difficulty of obtaining any real, long-term improvements in the labor conditions for garment workers.

We further suggest that the sheer number of UA requests, and the finding that in a number of UA cases concessions were gained, attest to the importance of these micro-

struggles. Focusing on the larger, more visible campaigns—as is often done in studies of transnational activism—and adopting a more historical-sociological perspective on the struggle for labor rights, tends to obscure the role of smaller, more local labor conflicts. Such small victories and defeats may be significant in understanding and appreciating overall movement outcomes (Gupta 2009). The positive interpretation is that, in the long run, the micro-struggles that UA cases bear witness to may help to establish management practices that, in the aggregate, result in structural improvements in the labor conditions in the garment industry.

As we have made clear throughout our analysis, our conclusions are indicative, as there are some limitations to the data and their analysis. Therefore, we refrained from pushing our analysis beyond the bivariate correlations that we presented. Yet, we find the fact that a substantial number of cases do result in successful outcomes for garment workers to be remarkable, given various reasons why one would expect a decrease in the success rate of urgent appeals. After all, brands, retailers and their suppliers might have developed ways to counter the UA system, through repression or other disturbing countertactics. It is also possible that, over time, the position of local workers and their representatives vis-à-vis local management has been reinforced—due to previous transnational support in the form of an urgent appeal, for example—such that they find it less necessary to invoke transnational support, and thereby appeal to the UA system only for the more difficult cases.

In this sense, our highlighting of the limitations of the data speaks to the study of transnational activism in general. It illustrates how the scale shift to transnational activism may not be an option that is equally available to all those aggrieved in non-Western countries, and also—if the option is available—that there may be reasons why some may and others may not choose to make use of it.

Our focus on UA outcomes for garment workers may downplay other outcomes of the UA system. For example, operating the UA system may in itself reinforce the TANs in the antisweatshop movement, and thereby contribute to the strength of the movement's infrastructure and cohesiveness. Moreover, the UA system may have wider cultural and biographical consequences (Giugni 2008). The system reinforces the CCC's organizational culture, as it motivates the organization's staff and supporters and informs and reinforces its ideology. It is also a constant reminder to the CCC staff of the continuing and pervasive struggles for labor rights in the global production networks of the garment industry. Being based in the capitals of European countries, and spending

much of their time raising awareness among consumers and talking to and campaigning against representatives of Western brands and retailers, CCC staff and other activists in the movement highly value the recurrent contacts with workers whose rights are at stake. The contacts are a lasting source of inspiration and motivation, as well as a precious source of contacts and accurate information on labor conditions to fuel regular campaigning (Sluiter 2009: 265). Further, urgent appeals may have an additional meaning and relevance for the workers involved, beyond the immediate question of its outcomes. They can experience the adoption of a UA request as a symbolic sign of success; somewhere in the world there are people who support their cause, which gives them a feeling of moral justification (Dent 2005: 28).

However, the most important implication of our analysis may relate to the study of movement outcomes. It suggests that, at least in the case of urgent appeals, some of the factors associated with the resource mobilization perspective, such as the use of disruptive tactics and the strength of movement organization, are not straightforward independent variables, but need themselves to be explained and understood in their context. For example, public urgent appeals might be considered more disruptive than non-public urgent appeals. By entering this distinction as a variable in a regression, one misses out on the intricacies that are at play in the decision to make an urgent appeal public or not. Many urgent appeals are not made public; in many cases it is decided not to do so, and in other cases the threat of making an urgent appeal public suffices to gain advantages. The use of more disruptive tactics may hence be interpreted as a sign of movement failure. Similarly, strength of movement organization, whether considered at the local, national, or transnational level, is the result of considerable and prolonged effort on the part of the movement, often obtained in spite of obstruction, retaliation, and repression. To suggest that the Tunisian case described earlier was only partly successful because the TAN was not strong enough is to deny that movement strength is in itself an outcome of interaction between the movement, its targets, and perhaps bystanders and allies of either the movement or its targets (as it transpired in this case, communication in the TAN was frustrated by the police). The notion of opportunities is also an insufficient explanation of UA outcomes. As we discussed above, limited opportunities for protest may influence what is the object of protest. Reflexivity, strategic choice, and interaction are thus relevant in understanding outcomes of UA cases for garment workers, which confirms the importance of the emerging strategic-interaction perspective in explaining movement outcomes.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Clean Clothes Campaign is a central player in the global antisweatshop movement, established in the Netherlands in 1989. It focuses on brands and retailers, consumers, governments, and garment workers (Sluiter 2009: 17) in order to improve labor conditions and worker rights in the global apparel and sportswear industries. As of 2011, it comprises a network of fifteen national coalitions in fourteen European countries, an international secretariat located in Amsterdam, and over 200 collaborative relationships with NGOs and labor unions in both developed and developing countries.

<sup>1</sup> Since then, other groups have adopted this strategy, too. See for example, LabourStart's "Act NOW" website (LabourStart n.d.) and the Maquila Solidarity Network's "Urgent Action" system (MSN n.d.). The CCC and MSN occasionally collaborate in specific UA cases. Letter writing on individual cases is also a well-known strategy in the human rights movement. The analysis and discussion in this paper are based on the CCC Urgent Appeal system.

<sup>1</sup> Of course, exploitative labor conditions are not unique to the current globalized garment industry, nor are collective action and protest against them. For example, Friedman (1996), Sklar (1998), Dickson, Loker, and Eckman (2009: 7-10), and others delve into some of the history of antisweatshop protest. Yet, structural conditions have changed such that it can be justified, in our view, to start the discussion in the late 1980s.

<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the movement works along regulatory lines. One such strategy attempts to secure the implementation of fair labor standards through the pursuit of social clauses in international trade agreements, which would set the terms and conditions of international trade (Tsogas 2001). Another is pursued by Global Union Federations, which strongly promote the negotiation of international framework agreements to co-design employment relations within transnational corporations and their global production networks (Fichter, Helden, and Sydow 2011).

<sup>1</sup> We would have liked to include information on corporate proxy targets in order to tap into the notion of corporate opportunities (Schurman 2004), such as how vulnerable brand and retailers are to reputation damage due to "retail presence, high brand value, and elastic product demand" (McAteer and Pulver 2009: 6). Our analysis would also have benefited from the inclusion of information on the factories from which the urgent appeals originated (Locke et al. 2007), but again, such information was not available to us.

<sup>1</sup> We left out of the analysis cases from countries from which only one urgent appeal originated.

<sup>1</sup> Political rights refer to the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and the functioning of government. Civil liberties refer to the freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. (For a comprehensive overview of the methodology, see Freedom House 2010).

<sup>1</sup> Further information on the case can be found on the Clean Clothes Campaign website (CCC 2009).

<sup>1</sup> We consider the demand for "freedom of association" to be a movement frame, rather than a key issue, as it is an umbrella concept that covers several of the issues at stake. It is often used as a "master frame" (Snow and Benford 1988) and occasionally referred to as the source of the problem, as its solution, or as worth fighting for.

"Union repression" refers to all urgent appeals where the main demand is union recognition and not reversing dismissals or factory closure; it includes many instances of violence and intimidation. "Labor rights" refers to the non-observance or violation of locally relevant labor regulations, as formulated in national laws, collective bargaining agreements, or multi-stakeholder agreements. It is used for cases that do not mention factory closure, factory fire, worker dismissal, or when union members are the only victims. "Labor laws" refers to urgent appeals directed at governments to change laws. "Imprisonment" was used if the detainment was initiated by the government and not by company management as part of union repression. "Murder" and "harassment of labor activist" are considered to be state-focused, since it is the government that is responsible for carrying out an investigation and prosecuting the suspects.



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