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# Beyond the Cloth: Exploring How Women are Represented in Human Rights Organizations through Bangladesh's Garment Industry

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**BEYOND THE CLOTH**

In Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

MASTERS OF ARTS

In

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

**BRIAWNA T. GILLESPIE**

November 23, 2016

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

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Advisor

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Academic Director

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Dean of Arts and Sciences

Date:

**Abstract**  
**Understanding Beyond the Cloth**

This thesis conducts a textual analysis on several human rights organizations. It looks at how human rights organizations represent women in the garment industry. I investigate a variety of organizations and look at how they utilize women's voices to demonstrate how human rights organizations frame women's narratives in a way that supports their own claims. When organizations representing women in this way, it only limits women's voices from being heard and hinders them from being empowered and a leading force in the industry. On the one hand, we see organizations create spaces where women's narratives are exposed and provide images where we as an audience can put a face to women in the garment industry. On the other hand, we see organizations use women's voice and images in a way that frames ideas, which gears the audience's attention to take action on certain issues. This thesis demonstrates that scholars and organizations need to pay attention to how they represent women in human rights.

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## Chapter One

### Exploring the Debates in the Garment Industry

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013 around 9 o'clock in the morning, the Rana Plaza came crashing down in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. This eight story plaza supplied clothes for many well-known international companies like Wal-Mart, Children's Place Clothing, H&M and many more. The day before the factory collapsed, a government inspector had order an evacuation of all workers. The inspector announced to the workers that the building was unsafe because of its structural issues.<sup>1</sup> The building had cracks in the walls, electrical wiring problems and unsafe work stations that exposed workers to chemicals and toxins. The morning of the collapse, managers of the plaza persuaded, forced and in most cases threatened the workers to return to work. Many of the women workers complained, reminding the managers of what the inspector had previously required. However, this plea did not seem to resonate with the managers. They suggested the workers' concerns were unimportant and told them if they did not comply they would be dismissed.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after workers voiced significant concerns about the conditions, the building began to shake then collapsed. More than 1100 workers were killed, and over 2000 suffered major injuries. According to an article in *The Guardian*, "A government investigation found that there had been a series of irregularities in its construction- the top two floors were added illegally and the building was not built for industrial use."<sup>3</sup> The article furthered explained, "The investigating committee, appointed by the interior ministry, found that the ground Rana Plaza was built on was

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<sup>1</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. 3.: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Bangladesh factory collapse blamed on swampy ground and heavy machinery." *The Guardian* (May 23, 2013). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/23/bangladesh-factory-collapse-rana-plaza>.

unfit for a multi-story building. Committee head Khaandker Mainuddin Ahmed stated, "A portion of the building was constructed on land which had been a body of water before and was filled with rubbish." Furthermore, "he said the land had been swampy with shallow water."<sup>4</sup>

The building collapse was one of the most substantial losses of life in the garment industry in recent history. Five months before the Rana Plaza collapsed, approximately 112 garment workers were killed and hundreds suffered injuries in a fire at the Tazreen Fashion Factory. This was one of the deadliest factory fires that the Bangladeshi garment industry had seen in recent years. Similar to the Rana Plaza workers, Tazreen factory workers were intimidated and barred from leaving their work stations. The managers forced them to work while the ground floor of the factory was burning and alarms were going off.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, this incident has not been the only one of its kind. Solidarity Center has identified at least 68 factory fires which mostly involved women workers and resulted in the estimated 30 deaths.<sup>6</sup> These situations we might argue are representative of decision-making that emphasizes generating revenue over the lives of workers in the Bangladeshi garment industry, particularly women workers.

Reading some of the accounts of the garment industry and understanding the complications within it, in this chapter, I will present arguments that will highlight the larger problems within the industry. It will also analyze some of the debates economists and humanitarians have on how they believe issues in the industry should be handled in regards to how each views and value the industry. The purpose of this chapter is not to determine whose

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. 4.: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Connell, Tula. "Two Years after Fatal Tazreen Fire, Life Worse for Survivors." Solidarity Center (November 21, 2014). <http://www.solidaritycenter.org/two-years-after-fatal-tazreen-fire-life-worse-for-survivors/>.

ideas are right or wrong. Instead, it is to examine how women's narratives are used in their decision-making and how when advocating for people narratives are created and heard. I also show how the debates' proposed solutions on behalf of people rather than coming up with policies and solutions by consulting workers. They fail to use women's voices who are the victims in the industry to find resolutions; instead, they give their opinion on what they believe is best for the workers in the industry.

Throughout this chapter, I will build my argument through four sections. In the first section, I give a quick glimpse of the history of the garment industry and how it emerged to where it is today. Specifically, it will concentrate on the issues of workplace discriminations, labor rights violations and the constant dismissal of company interventions. Furthermore, I point out the common issues experienced by women workers in factories throughout Bangladesh. The second section will analyze economists' debates. In this section, I will outline and confirm how they have an awareness of the problems in the garment industry, however there is a disregard to the challenges women face daily. I turn to the "better than" statement, which some economists use for their arguments. I personally define this statement is used to say that there are always worse alternatives, so regardless of how bad one situation can be, it is essentially "better than" being in an even worse situation. This is to show the lack of appreciation there is to understand women workers. Within the industry, there is a common understanding among the economists' that although the conditions are not adequate it is better than the alternative.

In the third section, I turn to the humanitarian side and point out their concern for garment workers. This section will look at the issues with a humanitarian lens and identify what solutions have been developed by humanitarian workers to address the problems and help woman to obtain better rights and safer working conditions. In the final section of this chapter, I

will demonstrate the gap and the misunderstanding between the economists' and the humanitarian organizations points of view. The debate between the two groups lacks how to truly advocate and represent women workers. To be more specific, my purpose in this final argument is to not take a side on who has the best solutions or ideas on what the garment industry should be doing or look like. Instead, it is to demonstrate how these debates fail to recognize or represent the women for whom they speak, because they get so engaged in the debate, they essentially forget and lose the importance of the people whom they are debating over. That is, they do not utilize women's stories in a way that can potentially change the core culture of the garment industry today.

Although the advocates for these women garment workers mean well, they still do not want to include or allow women to lead or be part of the change. Humanitarians claim themselves as the first responders/main voice for workers to help their policies and funding grow. Humanitarians mean well, but they cannot lose the voice of the people they are trying to help. There are few representatives that give women workers a face and a voice to understand what they really want and need. Laws, unions, and policies are in place, but when women actually get to participate they get shut down. I assert in the end that understanding how to advocate for people is necessary to understand how individuals' narratives are important in the process to create change. There should be more inclusive work for women workers who have personally experienced the industry firsthand.

## **1.2: Advocacy Redefined**

In trying to find an effective way to create change and understand advocacy, it is important to understand the various dimensions of the problem advocates face. It is important to

understand the challenges the women garment workers experience, because they are at the center of the issues that need to change. For such an understanding, this section breaks down the problems the industry has on women workers. It shows how fashion and consumer interest, supply of materials, and money are prioritized over women workers' rights.

Bangladesh has been in the garment industry for over 25 years. In the late 1970s, economic opportunities opened up in the textile industry when new rules allowed suppliers to get involved with American and European markets. Since entrepreneurs took advantage of the opportunities they had from low cost suppliers and little government monitoring, garment exports grew into a \$6 billion industry. This fast flow of money helped the economy to thrive and employ a wide range of workers throughout the country. "The growth of this industry has been dramatic."<sup>7</sup> "In the 1983-4 fiscal year, Bangladesh exported garments worth just over US\$31.5 million, and employed 120,000 workers in 384 factories. By 2013-14 it exported garments worth more than US\$24 billion, and employed some 4 million workers in 4,536 factories."<sup>8</sup> However, the wider problems at hand were yet to emerge. This fast flow of fashion would merely be the beginning of a chaotic industry. This industry continues to support unreasonable levels of inhumane treatment. For example, Bangladesh's government has historically not helped workers. They aid in the problems by paying below minimum wage to women and have poor industrial relations.<sup>9</sup> From work place discrimination, labor rights violations, and the constant dismissal of company interventions, this industry's downward spiral remains unchecked.

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<sup>7</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. 7: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> "About Garment Industry of Bangladesh." Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association. <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/about/AboutGarmentsIndustry>.

<sup>9</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. Human Rights Watch, 2015.

Women are at the center of these issues since they are the majority in the field. They face constant discrimination for wages, gender, and maternity. Considering about 26% of the population is below the poverty line, women are poorer than men because of their social economic status,<sup>10</sup> which makes it difficult since women from poor backgrounds are dependent on the work. Work discrimination is common, especially when women are in need of maternity leave. According to Bangladesh's Labor Act law, pregnant women are not to be given "any work which is of an arduous nature."<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with women workers stating, "pregnant women are given a heavy load and if they could not do it they are fired."<sup>12</sup> This statement is common for women to hear since managers are insensitive to their needs and do not care about their rights.

This lack of care is apparent with most of women's worker rights. Bangladesh's government is responsible for ensuring that workers are being protected. While Bangladesh does have laws in place, they still fall short of international standards. Workers work overtime due to the high demand of orders. Owners are self-interested and are more concerned with maximizing profits. They do not believe in paying overtime or offer any insurance in case of worker injury. According to Human Rights Watch, "Workers in almost all of the factories complained that managers did not pay the wage or benefits in full or on time. This included pay for overtime, maternity benefits, the 'Eid holiday bonus, and compensation for working vacations."<sup>13</sup> This is

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<sup>10</sup>Siddique, M.A.B. Gender Issues in Poverty Alleviation: A Case Study of Bangladesh. Vol. 25. 149: ", International Journal of Social Economics, <http://redfame.com/journal/index.php/ijss/article/viewFile/775/718>.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter IV, Section 45, of the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 (amended 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. 24-25: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

common, since managers and the government do not prioritize women's pay in comparison to men.

As a result, women attempt to form unions so they can receive the rights they should be entitled to. However, the idea of forming a union often puts them at risk of facing some kind of punitive response from management. Unions are important since they provide a way for workers to protect their rights. Nevertheless, forming unions is not encouraged by managers because it allows women to have a voice. To illustrate, Human Rights Watch reported, "Some workers involved with setting up trade unions have faced extreme violence by managers or by local criminals, known as *mastans*, who openly admit to acting on behalf of factory managers."<sup>14</sup> Most workers are not spared regardless of being male, female or, in some cases pregnant. It is common for women to be beaten, sexually assaulted, and intimidated by managers, who try to stop their efforts to gain worker rights.<sup>15</sup> Also, unions are often denied registration. According to the International Labour Organization," The on-line trade union registration system is developed to gradually include information on registered trade unions and trade union federations, complaints and actions taken in regard to unfair labour practices as well as educational and welfare activities for workers."<sup>16</sup> Without registration it is harder and in most case unachievable for worker demands to get met, and for them to receive benefits like wage increases.

Certainly not receiving a proper paycheck or no wage increases only connects to larger problems regarding corporation's and dismissal of company interventions. Companies know that without factories, they would have no business. This link between businesses and factories does

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "On-line registration system for trade unions launched." International Labour Organization (April 7, 2015). [http://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Informationresources/Publicinformation/Pressreleases/WCMS\\_358947/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Informationresources/Publicinformation/Pressreleases/WCMS_358947/lang--en/index.htm).

mean that companies are responsible for their workers, regardless if they have a direct connection with the factory. Ultimately, companies are sourcing from factories, which holds them accountable for worker treatment and wages. Considering the multiple factory disasters, it only makes sense that women would be compensated for the tragedy they experienced. The problem is that companies find reasons to not pay. Human Rights Watch stated, “Among those that replied, some said that they have given money directly to NGOs or others groups supporting victims instead of the ILO chaired fund. Others denied they were doing business with the Rana Plaza factories, or that supplier had done so without permission.”<sup>17</sup> This reasoning usually gets companies out of paying anything to workers and gets their case dismissed unless there is persistence in tracking down the truth from international companies. It is normal that everyone does not find him or herself to be involved. It is very common when it comes down to different groups who try to resolve the issues and how they respond to the problems.

Given these points, we gather the garment industry has multiple issues that cause controversy to many human rights groups. Since these topics are not understood, or really discussed, it is essential to point out what worker’s experiences to uncover the complexity behind this industry. This section has shown the struggles women workers face. In order to know how to solve it, the following section will examine some debates from different groups on how the garment industry should function.

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<sup>17</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories: Human Rights Watch, 2015.



### 1.3: Economist and Humanitarian Responses

In many disastrous cases there are various responses and actions plans at hand. When figuring out how to respond and solve issues, scholars have their own solution they find to be more suited for the problem. In scholarship about the garment industry there are multiple opinions. Controversy over how the industry is, or should be, is important when understanding how advocacy works. For such an explanation, this section gives economists' views on the garment industry. It specifically looks at macroeconomist who support national growth, production levels, and country unemployment. These macroeconomists engage in how the economy behaves when jobs are available and production increase in the country. These economists self-identify in support of a growing economy, instead of focusing on the effects it has on humanity. It demonstrates how economists value the work the garment industry provides regardless of the working conditions women, since they believe there are worse alternatives women workers could experience and some work is better than none.

Economists often evaluate the industries problems and examine it from an economic and quantitative perspective, meaning that as long as they see an increase in economy and poverty rates, there are no problems that need to be fixed. Some economist believe the garment industry is beneficial. They see no harm when jobs are created. Jeffrey Sachs, author of *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* states, "My concern is not that there are too many sweatshops but that there are too few."<sup>18</sup> Jeffery, like many economists are in support of factories and makes it a mission to expand factories to help alleviate country poverty, considering the factories have helped alleviate poverty through skills development and employment generations according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufactures and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and

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<sup>18</sup> Sachs, Jeffrey D. *The End of Poverty: Economic Responsibility for Our Time*. New York: Penguin Group, 2005.

20 million people depend directly and indirectly on the garment industry.<sup>19</sup> Most are aware of conditions that workers are in, but find the “better than” argument to be at their advantage, considering this argument means that there can always be a worse circumstance compared to the one workers currently face.

In a like manner, economist Benjamin Powell, who is known for his support of sweatshops says, “Not only are sweatshops better than current workers’ alternatives, but they also are part of the process in developing that ultimately raises living standards.”<sup>20</sup> This is typical response of the proponent forces over the sweatshops when one hears about conditions workers face. Economist combat the complaints of workers conditions with the “better than” argument. They often do not find it necessary for complaints to be made or unions to be created by workers when they have a job. Hence, when they hear about unions being formed they are not in support.

As a result of unions not being supported, some economist like Morgan O. Reynolds, former chief economist of the U.S. Department of Labor, respond to this idea by saying unions are nothing more than monopolies and way for workers to gain unnecessary power against corporations.<sup>21</sup> Economists who are in agreement with idea often find unions affect job opportunities and try to combat union protesters by convincing them how unions will only take their jobs away instead of help, especially when workers ask to be compensated. Sachs further explains, “These sweatshop jobs are the targets of public protest in developed countries; those protest have helped to improve the safety and quality of the working conditions. The rich- world

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<sup>19</sup> "Industry Strengths." Bangladesh Garment Manufactures and Exporters Association (August 4, 2012). <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/Strengths#.VAB6tYwjwJ>.

<sup>20</sup> Powell, Benjamin. "In Defense of "Sweatshops"." (June 2, 2008). <http://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2008/Powellsweatshops.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Reynolds, Morgan O. "Labor Unions." (1993). <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/LaborUnions.html>.

protesters, however, should support increased numbers of jobs.”<sup>22</sup> Economist find time is money and the more complaining there is, the more workers are only making it harder for themselves.

Under those circumstances that women are hindering their own process by complaining, we see there is a heavy opinion on how the industry should be. There seems to be a lack of concern with the women and more concern for how the industry benefits the rest of society and corporations. Economists adhere that as long as women are working and not in a “worse situation” that everything is okay. As noted before, this “better than” thinking is not advocating for women. It is essentially telling them what is best without consulting them on what is needed or understanding their personal challenges.

With this in mind we have one side of the controversy. On the other side humanitarians have their own idea about how to address the problems within for the industry. In order to further understand, this section reads humanitarians’ views about the garment industry. It looks at human rights organizations that do not necessarily self-proclaim themselves as humanitarians but whose actions are to promote human welfare and work in terms of humanitarian efforts. It looks at how humanitarians take initiative to get companies to take ownership, unions, and working conditions in the country. It also looks at how humanitarians' view protecting and representing women.

Humanitarians find the garment industry to be more complex than economist. They often draw attention to the larger problems at hand, like who takes responsibility, unions, pay, and working conditions. Ownership, is one of the first places to start when trying to determine who responsible for such disasters when many lives are taken. However, when trying to find who is responsible, everyone steps back to avoid the problem. Organizations like the International

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<sup>22</sup> Sachs, Jeffrey D. *The End of Poverty: Economic Responsibility for Our Time*. New York: Penguin Group, 2005.

Labour Organization (ILO), Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and more commit themselves to finding who is responsible and improving workers lives. “The Clean Clothes Campaign network works to structurally improve working conditions and support the empowerment of manufacturing workers in the global garment and sportswear industries. We put pressure on companies and governments to take responsibility to ensure that the rights of manufacturing workers in global supply chains are respected and implemented.”<sup>23</sup> The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) makes it priority to expose those responsible. In their latest campaign in 2015, they partnered with the ILO, CCC, and more in their efforts to retrieve compensation for workers. The ILRF and CCC both wrote in their report, “It is vital that those individuals, government departments and companies that acted are held to account.”<sup>24</sup> The ILRF also put out an individual statement saying, “We continue to urge all apparel brands and retailers that source from Bangladesh to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, which now over 200 companies joined in order to make factories safer.”<sup>25</sup> These organizations make it their duty to put pressure on the contributors of the problem and urge them to take responsibility.

To prove who is responsible and should take ownership of what happened is not simple, but coming up with ways to improve unions for workers is slightly more feasible. Humanitarians thrive when workers are able to create unions. However, unions are not easy to create and normally do not last long. Unions are ways in which workers can further protect their rights and advance their interest in the industry. Robert J.S. Ross wrote, “Workers themselves, we have said, are the best inspectors and defenders of their rights-but they must have the rights to

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<sup>23</sup> "What We Believe In." Clean Clothes Campaign (November 14, 2012). <https://cleanclothes.org/about/principles>.

<sup>24</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign, International Labor Forum. "Rana Plaza 3 Years On: Compensation, Justice, Workers; Safety." (2016).

<sup>25</sup> International Labor Rights Forum. "Bangladesh Garment Industry Factory Safety." <http://www.laborrights.org/our-work/bangladesh-garment-factory-safety>.

organize to exercise the ability.”<sup>26</sup> Humanitarians make it their missions to advocate for unions to be formed. They see the impact that it has on workers and the efficiency that it brings to their daily lives. When conditions are bad and they are not being paid they have the right to not work. This is necessary considering wages are often not given to workers.

Workers in the majority of the factories throughout Bangladesh complain about not receiving the proper pay or compensation. Although money will never be enough to compensate workers for what they experience, organizations have taken it upon themselves to respond and show the impacts that compensation has on these women. Organizations like Clean Clothes Campaign and the International Labor Rights Forum keep track by implementing plans that help enforce compensation to families by putting pressure on the system. “Legal cases to obtain such payments are now underway in Bangladesh’s courts, although the processes are moving slowly through the court system and there is needs for more pressure on courts to resolve these cases.”<sup>27</sup> These organizations take it upon themselves to look into cases so that legal arrangements can be made and that working conditions can be improved.

In response to the numerous disasters that Bangladesh has, developments have expanded in improving working conditions. Organizations like the International Labor have implemented programs to create interventions and work hands-on with the government of Bangladesh to improve conditions. They have exposed the hidden secrets of unclean water, unsanitary facilities, assault, threats, and sexual violence that happens to women in factories. They have implemented short-term and long-term support for improving worker’s safety. “The ILO is working to improve structural and fire safety in the Ready-Made Garment Sector. It also helps build

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<sup>26</sup> Ross, Robert J.S. *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign, International Labor Forum. "Rana Plaza 3 Years On: Compensation, Justice, Workers; Safety." (2016).

capacity of national and regulatory bodies to carry out their mandate in a more effective and accountable manner.”<sup>28</sup> By working with locals in the country in collaborative efforts it helps to promote international standards. This approach has worked to create prompt and effective change.

After developing these ideas and grasping the standards organizations are trying to reach, we can now understand how humanitarians view the industry. There is a genuine concern for protecting women and making progress for their rights. However, once again we see how organizations are the voice of the people. They are implementing plans that will help women workers. Although this work is needed to help promote faster demands to the Bangladesh government, organizations still place their own ideas as a priority to make change. As mentioned before, women’s voices are missing in this advocacy work.

How can we expose women’s voices to allow for their voices to be heard when advocating change? This chapter has argued that it should not be up to “experts” to determine needs, but there should be a collaboration with women to allow them to have the first response of their own needs. Often, groups are quick to have answers without solely listening. Although there are multiple responses to the issues in the industry, my interest is not in determining who has the best response. Ultimately, there are solutions being made on behalf of people, but I want to know how organizations are working for the people. To find out how organizations are working for the people, this paper poses the following question: How do organizations mobilize, represent and erase women’s voices in the garment industry?

In the next chapter, I will investigate scholarly conversation about the garment industry and investigate the ways that women are being represented in human rights. Thus, I try to show

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<sup>28</sup> "Areas of Work." International Labour Organization. <http://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Areasofwork/lang--en/index.htm>.

how impact the garment industry has on women and the influence advocates have when representing women in human rights which all plays a role in women garment workers having a voice. From there, I will discuss the methods that are best suited for answering my research question and analyze what doing a textual analysis entails.

From this, it will proceed with a data analysis. This analysis will look at seven human rights organizations, and examine how the organizations represent women and explore the limitations that come with the way these organizations represent women. Which leads to the final chapter, that will conclude with theoretical and practical implications, that will help to understand the value of how women's voices are framed in human rights and to understand how this thesis works to recognize how human rights organizations work with women to create change.

## **Chapter two: Literature Review**

### **Promoting Women's Representation**

One of the many problems that the garment industry faces are women's voices being displaced. Understanding how human rights organizations utilize women's narratives is one step closer to acknowledging the importance of why women's voices need to be heard and honored, since their voices are often not acknowledged when policies and plans are being made or put into effect. In order to examine how women's voices are represented and silenced, I will establish the context represented for the study in three bodies of literature, around which I frame my thesis: fast fashions' effect on women garment workers, NGOs/humanitarians representing women, and women's representation in human rights. I examine these bodies of literature because all three impact how we understand the limits and possibilities of the ways Bangladeshi women workers narrate their working conditions in the garment industry.

Critics of fast fashion turn focus away from the consumer and company and place it on the women producing. As corporations' and consumers have the most control of the fast fashion industry, women workers in Bangladesh face the ultimate consequences that come with high fashion demands. They do not get to determine the work load they receive, but only perform tasks which they are given in order to make a living to provide for themselves and their families. In terms of NGOs and humanitarians representing women, how they are represented plays a role with the plans and policies women are protected by, which also ties in with how women are represented in human rights in general. Although these bodies of work show the representation and advocacy women workers have, they do not provide direct connections to how women narratives are being utilized, where they can vocalize their own needs first hand to the government, corporations, or even organizations. To provide that information with this literature,



I will investigate the following question: How does literature raise the question of do human rights organizations mobilize, represent, and erase women's narratives in the garment industry?

## **2.2: Fast Fashions Role on women in the garment industry**

Scholars whose literature focuses on fast fashion, focus on the effects it brings to women and the role it has on garment workers. Fast fashion is a term used to express how quickly clothes are manufactured at an inexpensive price. "Fast fashion is a radical method of retailing that has broken away from seasonal selling, puts out new inventory constantly throughout the year."<sup>29</sup> Clothing items are often priced lower than competition, so businesses can make clothes that are of low quality in high quantity. This process is used to meet the consumer taste and respond to the latest trends in the fashion industry. Here we see how retail owners (from their perspective), are focused on the industry making money and the consumer needs. Although this process appears convenient for multiple consumers clothing tastes, this fast production comes at the expense of another person.<sup>30</sup> This production affects many women in poorer countries like Bangladesh, China, and Sri Lanka.<sup>31</sup> Corporations take advantage of putting in mass orders because of the cheap labor they are paying for, but the industry is struggling trying to keep pace with the orders.<sup>32</sup> We will later see how Loeb and Cline only account for the perspective of the consumer and the implications the industry has on them instead of the garment workers themselves.

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<sup>29</sup> Cline, Elizabeth L. *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. New York: Penguin Group, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Brooks, Andrew. *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*. London: Zed Books, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Cline, Elizabeth L. *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. New York: Penguin Group, 2012.

Scholars who study fast fashion, bring attention to the consequences production has on workers. Although it seems like consumers benefit from having affordable clothes and companies make mass profits, the workers making the clothes suffer. The pressure women face to meet quota is explained by Robert J.S. Ross who writes, “Some managers are brutal in the way they house workers in firetraps, expose children to dangerous chemicals, deny bathroom breaks, demand sexual favors, force people to work double shifts and dismiss anyone who tries to organize a union.”<sup>33</sup> Ross argues the expectations women are faced with are unrealistic in comparison to the conditions women face. This idea of fashion being flawless is ruthless. Having perfect clothes at the speed women are required to produce them, with the working conditions they are in, is unrealistic. Andrew Brooks adds to the conversation stating, “Work in garment factories is a classic example of global patriarchy. Women pay the price for decisions made by men, as factory ownership in clothing manufacturing as well as senior management positions in international clothing firms are overwhelming males.”<sup>34</sup> Brooks argues that women in the garment industry suffer for the poor decisions men make. He ultimately argues that even when policies are put forth they are never with the full intent to address inequality or women labor rights. President of multiple retail companies, Walter Loeb, writes from an opposing side, “Adopting a fast fashion approach is an opportunity for retailers to be more fashion forward, more innovative with new ideas, and more service oriented. Fast fashion is about more than ensuring survival; it represents a way to grow at a time when growth is being hampered by

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<sup>33</sup> Ross, Robert J.S. *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004

<sup>34</sup> Brooks, Andrew. *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*. 28: London: Zed Books, 2015.

customer apathy.”<sup>35</sup> This idea of growth only focuses on the designer and the consumer. It is all about what is convenient and making it in a way that is quick and perfect. This idea gives designers opportunities, but does not give the actual manufacturers opportunities. Women workers are in a game of survival to keep their jobs when unreasonable quotas are asked of them.

In order for the women workers to meet their quotas, they have to put in an immense amount of work to survive. This survival game women workers face is pointed out by Liza Featherstone and the United Students Against Sweatshops, “...workers’ earnings depend on production levels rather than the hours they work, and where they are subjected to heat, fumes, insults, sexual harassment, physical punishments, and below-subsistence wages.”<sup>36</sup> Competition makes it a priority to seduce consumers<sup>37</sup>, but neglects the women manufacturing the clothes and their needs. Workers under fast fashion are subject to harsh treatment due to this standard of production.<sup>38</sup> It is clear that the industry is set up in a way where women cannot move forward to have reasonable working standards. They acknowledge women’s work, but only the rate at which they produce labor, not with the labor and overtime they put in.<sup>39</sup> Walter Loeb further explains, “The idea of moving merchandise quickly from the designer’s table to the retail sales floor has influenced the entire global retail industry and attracted competition. Companies like H&M and Forever 21 have also turned fast fashion into a big business. Their consumer appreciates a ‘new look’ that can be worn for the moment and views the merchandise as a

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<sup>35</sup> Loeb, Walter. "Who are the Fast Fashion Leaders and Why does it Matter?" Forbes (October 23, 2015). <http://www.forbes.com/sites/walterloeb/2015/10/23/who-are-the-fast-fashion-leaders-and-why-does-it-matter/#444c116f1554>.

<sup>36</sup> Featherstone, Liza. *Students against Sweatshops*.: Verso, 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Cline, Elizabeth L. *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. New York: Penguin Group, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. 26: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

temporary treasure; not something you will keep forever.”<sup>40</sup> The consumer sees clothing items for their short term usage, but are not aware of the intense work that is put in to meet their consumer needs.

This lack a transparency with the consumer and the manufacturers is a reflection of the conditions women are in. Working conditions are often discussed as an issue, and is another way women are looked by literature. Human Rights Watch writes, “...little has been done to address poor working conditions. In many factories, these remain dire, in breach both of national law and the standards that are often stipulated by the western retailers who buy most of Bangladesh’s garments.”<sup>41</sup> We see how women are discussed in terms of the harsh conditions they are in and the violence they are subjected to, yet there is still a struggle to see beyond this in the world of fast fashion.

Despite the reasons why fast fashion is dangerous, retailers are not concerned with the effects. Consumers are not exposed to the manufacturing process like corporations are, which makes the consumer oblivious to the conditions workers experience. Cline, in her journey to factories, expressed, “I can only imagine trying to keep production deadlines in the face a Bangladeshi traffic jam.”<sup>42</sup> This lack of knowing how much labor workers put in, even down to their hectic commute to work is common for a consumer. This idea that everything has to get done in order to keep up with the corporation’s orders is a common goal for factory workers, so they do not lose employment with corporations. Consumers are not aware of that this is the

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<sup>40</sup> Loeb, Walter. "Who are the Fast Fashion Leaders and Why does it Matter?" Forbes (October 23, 2015). <http://www.forbes.com/sites/walterloeb/2015/10/23/who-are-the-fast-fashion-leaders-and-why-does-it-matter/#444c116f1554>.

<sup>41</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories.22: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Cline, Elizabeth L. Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion. 185: New York: Penguin Group, 2012

typical work ethic garment workers experience daily. Here we see there is an understanding of the labor that workers put in is extensive, however the focus still is on why meeting quotas in the industry is important and keeping corporations and consumers satisfied.

Analyzing the literature on fast fashions' effects on women in the garment industry, established that companies and consumers influence garment workers lives.<sup>43</sup> Scholars have shown that women in the fast fashion industry are expected to create flawless and perfect material. Corporations and consumers are relying on women workers, but are not concerned or aware of their working conditions. Literature continues to focus and address women in terms of wages, expectations and working conditions. However, questions on who is supporting women to have say in the process of manufacturing, which would allow them to have a voice on their working rights, is the gap that seems to be growing.

### **2.3. Women's Representation in Human Rights**

The impact human rights have on women is complex, but relevant when discussing how it impacts the garment industry. Literature lays out how human rights have evolved into making policies more relevant to women and presenting equal opportunities' as men, while also allowing there to be rights that are specifically for women. This section shows how women are represented in human rights and gives an overall idea of how women's representation is relevant and important when discussing the garment industry.

Women have been poorly represented in human rights for decades. In 1993, the slogan 'Women's rights are human rights' became famous by the women's rights movement at a

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<sup>43</sup> Brooks, Andrew. Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes.234-236: London: Zed Books, 2015.

Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.<sup>44</sup> This conference was the beginning of a movement for international human rights systems to be reminded of how women need to be represented as equals universally. Hillary Clinton and her speech on women's rights in 1995 also called for women rights to be moved beyond rhetoric and actually put into practice.<sup>45</sup> Initiatives for women's human rights were made prior to this movement by the United Nations. According to author Fleur van Leeuwen, women's movements have looked to the United Nations human rights system as a model to bring attention to how women are represented.<sup>46</sup> The UN has purposely worded the declaration to be gender neutral by using phrases such as 'all human beings', instead of being gender exclusive. They even provide a convention, personally set aside for women (The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) to provide a more effective gender inclusive system to protect women.

When examining at human rights discourse, there has been criticism of the system and the way women are represented; human rights seems to only work at a policy level, material changes and humanitarian reasoning. Fleur van Leeuwen explores some of the criticism in the UN system stating, "Critics of this international system argue that the specific mechanisms that were established to deal exclusively with enjoyment of human rights has led to marginalization of women's rights."<sup>47</sup> Separating women within an institutional mechanism only enforce the idea humanity that women are the lesser being amongst human bodies. This notion questions whether the system is representing women or just labeling their rights without actual representation in

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<sup>44</sup> Leeuwen, Fleur van. *Women's Rights Are Human Rights: The Practice of the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Utrecht University, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> "Hillary Rodham Clinton: Remarks to the U.N. 4th World Conference on Women Plenary Session." American Rhetoric.com. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/hillaryclintonbeijingspeech.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Leeuwen, Fleur van. *Women's Rights Are Human Rights: The Practice of the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.: Utrecht University, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

practice. Pamela Scully writes, “A gendered historical analysis shows that human rights discourse about women’s experiences of gender violence are more ambiguous and ambivalent than might appear.”<sup>48</sup> Scully argues that it is important to recognize gender-based violence and suffering, because it can enable power and discrimination against women when discussing human right initiatives, which rejects the idea of neutrality that human rights positions itself. Human rights advocacy comes with many restrictions and has been challenged by scholars. Sonia Alvarez examines the impacts human rights policy can have on feminist groups. “Human rights advocacy must typically define policy advocacy within national or international political and/or juridical institutions. Policy advocacy, in other words is a powerful but constrained form of feminist activism because it does not necessarily intervene at the level of cultural change.”<sup>49</sup> Once again, there is a separation that human rights is ingrained in the system, where policy takes over but does not create a cultural change on the ground. If it easy to incorporate policy for human right discourse, but if it is not creating a ground change for women then it is not useful. Aside from this we see once again a separation of what feminist groups are capable of fixing, verse the policy makers in human rights. All of these separations makes it difficult to create change, if there is a dismissal of ideas women contribute and a mentality that they are a lesser being amongst other bodies.

Transnational feminists point out representation of women is beyond law and political structure. They challenge the male dominance and highlight tensions in other areas that are more than political issues. Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol write in their book *Just Advocacy?* “They have also pointed out human rights movements have focused on the civic and political

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<sup>48</sup> Scully, Pamela, and Dorothy Hodgson. *Gender and Culture at the Limit of Rights*. 18: Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Alvarez, Sonia E. "Translating the Global Effects of Transnational Organizing on Local Feminist Discourses and Practices in Latin America." *Meridians* 1, no. 1 (2000): 29-67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40338427>.

rights, not economic, social, and cultural rights, those of which most impact women.”<sup>50</sup> In spite of having laws, if they are not effective on the ground in multiple areas of women’s lives, then the laws are not useful for representing women. This is apparent in areas of maternity, labor and violence that woman experience.

Transnational feminists find their position to be prevalent when women’s organizations have a role in the ground issues and pressure the international systems to follow suite. For example, Hesford and Kozol write, “New players from the non-profit sector, such as Women’s Environment and Development Organizations, the Women’s EDG, and activists from other social movements, such as the Students against Sweatshops, are joining with the Unions as strategic partners in growing transnational advocacy network and labor rights. These collaborations help to expand traditional ideas about the role unions can play in the movement for global justice.”<sup>51</sup> These actors will bond together with international actors to represent women to help them on a more intimate level. Hesford and Kozol further explain,

It is not enough to simply reframe rights of women workers as basic citizenship rights or human rights. The discourses of democracy and of human rights must be analyzed and interrogated before they can be used to create transnational forms of feminist solidarity, advocacy, and activism. Activists will need to pay closer attention to cultural contexts and to the historical specificity of women’s location within the global economy and to women’s location within advocacy networks seeking to address the dislocation of globalization on women workers.<sup>52</sup>

By advocating on a cultural level and within communities, there would be a shift in human rights work. When paying attention to the cultural context, there ultimately is a material change, meaning a physical change happening in a cultural group beyond just policy. Advocates and activists sometimes rely on those changes verses rights/policies to see if physical progress is

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<sup>50</sup> Hesford, Wendy S., and Wendy Kozol. *Just Advocacy?*: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Hesford, Wendy S., and Wendy Kozol. *Just Advocacy?* 221-222: Rutgers University Press, 2005.



being made within a culture or community. The most effective way to help these women is to do both, not choosing which one they find to be best.

Aside from the material changes that are often easier to see happening, humanitarian's have their own reasoning for rights to receive the changes that they want to happen. They play the field to get sentimental value to get the change they need implemented. Didier Fassin writes in his book *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*,

On the one hand, moral sentiments are focused mainly on the poorest, most unfortunate, most vulnerable individuals: the politics of compassion is a politics of inequality. On the other hand, the condition of possibility of moral sentiments is generally the recognition of others as fellows: the politics of compassion is a politics of solidarity. This tension between inequality and solidarity, between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance, is constitutive of all humanitarian government. It explains the frequently observed ambivalence of authorities, of donors, and of agents working for the good of others, and it accounts for what has been called compassion fatigue, the wearing down of moral sentiments until they turn into indifference or even aggressiveness toward the victims of misfortune. But it also explains the shame felt by the poor, the beneficiaries of aid, all those who receive these gifts that call for no counter gift, and accounts for the resentment and even hostility sometimes expressed by the disadvantaged and the dominated toward those who think of themselves as their benefactors.<sup>53</sup>

Here, Fassin explains the impact sentiment has on people. He argues that humanitarian government can generate a negative or positive response through the way they generate sentiment. Humanitarianism, has become a huge force in the world. The impact and the persuasion it can have on the general public and government influence with the sentiment it brings is helpful but also dangerous. Humanitarian organizations that fit into this idea of dominations, control how society see the aid beneficiaries. Fassin writes,

Humanitarian reason governs precarious lives: the lives of the unemployed and the asylum seekers, the lives of sick immigrants and people with AIDs, the lives of disaster victims and victims of conflict— threatened and forgotten lives that humanitarian government brings into existence by protecting and revealing them. When compassion is exercised in the public space, it is thus always directed from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker, the

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<sup>53</sup> Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. 2: The University of California Press, 2012. <https://www.sss.ias.edu/files/Reason-Seminar.pdf>.

more fragile, the more vulnerable— those who can generally be constituted as victims of an overwhelming fate. The concept of precarious lives therefore needs to be taken in the strongest sense of its Latin etymology: lives that are not guaranteed but bestowed in answer to prayer, or in other words are defined not in the absolute of a condition, but in the relation to those who have power over them. Humanitarian government is indeed a politics of precarious lives.<sup>54</sup>

Fassin argues that humanitarians have control on what issues are important for audiences to pay attention to. He suggests that their needs to be caution on the amount of power that organizations have when influencing outsiders. This focuses on humanitarians having strong control on what issues they want to draw attention too. They essentially are the voice of people, and influence how endangered groups are looked at and perceived. Humanitarians play a vital role in how they publicize a community and the politics that comes from it. Their goals can either help or be of more detriment to the lives of people.

However, scholars have shown how there are limits with in human rights discourse. Literature has shown that their human rights works on many levels, from policy, material change and on humanitarian reason. Yet, they have not accounted for how women should be represented and work to expose their voice. Therefore, in the next section, I will examine how advocacy groups represent women and address systems of policy. In the next section, I examine how NGOs/humanitarians best represent garment workers and discuss what they find to be the most productive when advocating for women garment workers.

## 2.4. Advocacy

Representation also takes on other meanings. In *Just Advocacy*, authors Hesford and Kozol believe the best way they can create change is by looking at the systems which “advocate”

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<sup>54</sup> Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. 4: The University of California Press, 2012. <https://www.sss.ias.edu/files/Reason-Seminar.pdf>.

women's needs. Examining systems should not just be looked at as a goal, but as an object of study.

The concept of human rights as women's rights becomes here an object for analysis rather than a goal to endorse. Such analysis is important for all those involved in feminist work in various institutional settings-academic, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), community-based organizations, United Nations, state agencies. Feminist are examining discourses, the instrumentalities, the technologies, the power differences- all those aspects that require us to understand how something works, why it works, why it does not work, how else can activism be done, and what is lost in doing something one way.<sup>55</sup>

Hesford and Kozol demonstrate that human rights take on more responsibility than helping others. They argue that analyzing organizations is important for determining organizations agendas. It is important to understand organizations roles in relation to the amount of control and influence they have over the people whom they advocate for. NGOs and humanitarian groups take matters into their own hands on how to represent women. Many have gone to speak with woman in the industry and have conducted interviews to see how they are affected by daily consumer consumption (normally from first world countries). There are also groups that protest, and create ways to stand up for these women. Human Rights Watch conducts interviews with workers and their families to hear how they are personally affected. They use stories so that they can acknowledge the issues that workers face. Human Rights Watch states, "We interviewed over 160 workers."<sup>56</sup> These interviews came from victims and families who have suffered in the industry because of fast fashion. Human Right Watch informs interviewees of the interviews' purposes and uses, and often end the conversation there. They find the value in workers' narratives to be beneficial in the overall cases and claims to be made. Yet, there is no personal representation to get workers voices out there so that the can have their own platform.

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<sup>55</sup> Hesford, Wendy S., and Wendy Kozol. *Just Advocacy?*: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

<sup>56</sup> *Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories*. Human Rights Watch, 2015.

Viewing women's rights as an object, appears to be a more direct approach for women to be represented. Understanding the system is the way to understand the problem on a more personal level. Also, collaborating with other advocacy groups who share the same common goals is another way that scholars find to be beneficial. Keck and Sikkink state,

New norms and discourses are emerging from and helping to shape global governance from one economic liberalism to another and free trade to one corporate responsibility, debt relief, transparency of economic institutions, global justice, etc. Transnational Labor advocacy networks have become mobilizing structures for feminists to play an active role in shaping the discourse and mobilizing strategies for labor activism.<sup>57</sup>

Keck and Sikkink point to this idea of networking. They argue in favor of having a network which helps organizations to mobilize their tasks faster. Organizations find joining forces to be a more dominant approach when trying to create a cultural change, because having authority in numbers allows for work to get done. When there are international connections that all combat one issue, it puts pressure on government and local organizations to make change. This idea focuses on there being more power in numbers, which ultimately would be the best way to advocate in order to help women, which could help change policies within the government.

Which is why it not surprising when organizations like the Clean Clothes Campaign are a strong force for influencing policy in the garment industry. "The CCC has close relations to a companion research center and produces highly documented research reports and policy proposals. It took the lead in producing a code of conduct for European retailers and producers and distinctly, organizes European consumers to send postcards to targeted firms questioning their labor practices."<sup>58</sup> Their encouragement to engage consumers in understanding the labor process of workers is beneficial. However, there is no explicit analysis on how women workers

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<sup>57</sup> Keck, Margaret, and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Ross, Robert J.S. *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004.

influence the policy and research that organizations conduct. Furthermore, organizations like the CCC demonstrate the importance of implementing policy and getting all players involved with the garment industry whether directly or indirectly involved in being aware of the issues.

However, when scholars are trying to find or prove why their structure of advocacy works, they do not account for the women workers who are the victims of the problem and ask what they need in order for their rights to be represented. Most organizations take it upon themselves to collaborate and work on policies without consulting the women they are essentially working for. As such, literature can work on their behalf to help create more substantial work conditions, but it cannot fully determine the advocacy needed without consulting or understanding the women's stories who are suffering in the garment industry. This approach can be beneficial since women have been under represented in human rights for years, so collaborating when trying to represent women's human rights is a necessary component when trying to implement a change. While this section and the previous two touch on helping women and their rights, there are still connections missing within the three bodies of literature. In the last section, I will address what links are missing to the literature and present where my thesis question will contribute to the overall discussion.

## **2.5. Threading the Literature Together**

These ideas look at fast fashion from many extremes. Either women workers are being treated poorly by fast fashion or they are not being heard by the industry at all and have no influence on the consumer/retail side. The literature examines the global influence fast fashion has, but do not thoroughly examine the influence it has on women workers directly to allow their struggles to be heard.

In this chapter, I have explored the literature regarding women's voices in three bodies of work: fast fashions influence on Bangladeshi women garment workers, NGOs/humanitarians representation on women workers and lastly how women are represented in human rights. While organizations are the first responders to crises in the garment industry, there still seems to be separation in the overall goal. The missing part of this research is still my research question: How do human rights organizations mobilize, represent and erase women's voices in the garment industry?

Actors are aware of women's underrepresentation in human rights. They agree that having a law in place is not enough representation for women, but find it necessary to bring in outside opinion to pressure the legal structures. Even with the pressure to create more ground change and eagerness to represent women on a more social, economic and cultural level there is lack of women narrative who can vocalize their own human right's needs. Yet scholars, continue to focus on changing policy and have not accounted for the impacts their policies have on women in the industry. The gap here shows how women's narratives are not being represented.

As a result, they all fail to fully understand and account for how to accurately expose women's voices and mobilize them in a way to initiate change. Some literature helps to see that there is a lack of representation and work to resolve the practical problems at hand, but disregard the main narratives that should be talking. Fixing some of the basic principles in the industry is important, but they all fail to explore how they deploy the stories of the women they claim to represent.

In conclusion, my thesis links all three bodies of literature by analyzing how representation of women and advocates influence women workers from gaining a voice and being able to be the first responders of the problem. Furthermore, I will continue to examine how

women are not seen in these organizations campaigns and the influence that has when trying to solve problems. Understanding these problems, will contribute to the overall stance of where women's voices are today within the garment industry. After having reviewed the bodies of literature, the following chapter will show the methodology needed to show the gaps that were missing in the literature and to ultimately answer my research question.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **Understanding the Design of the Research**

In the previous chapter, I outlined some contemporary scholarly research to demonstrate that these works point to the need to study how human rights organizations represent the women they claim to speak with and for. It is in this context that I defined the question that guides this study: How do human rights organizations employ women in the garment industry? This chapter argues that such a question is best answered by doing close textual analysis.

There are a multitude of methods that can be used when discussing how human rights organizations represent women. However, my research question specifically concentrates on how human rights organizations mobilize, represent and erase women's voices in the garment industry. Thus, this thesis is concerned with the story human rights organizations tell about these women to understand how these stories are being employed and deployed. To better understand this relationship between human rights organizations and women garment workers, I turn to the method of textual analysis to closely look at how organizations are utilizing women in their campaign efforts to create change in the garment industry. I argue that doing a close reading is far more suitable for answering the research question because it allows to understand the effects of the language used organizations as they try to create a cultural or policy change.

When doing a textual analysis, it is far more than just reading information. Close reading requires techniques and methods in order to receive quality information. Concepts have a deeper meaning that are socially constructed, which is why deep reading is important. Text has multiple layers and should be deeply examined. Tvedt writes,

This idea that language and text have multiple layers of meaning indicates that this meaning can be created –and located – on various “places” in a text, depending on the angle and attention of the reader. The methodology of close reading is attentive to the ways meaning



exists within the various levels and components of a text, at the intersection between what is being said and how this is expressed, and that one word can be understood in different ways depending on the “level” on which the reading is done and the context in which one does that reading. There is more to discover in a text than what is directly expressed on the surface, and meanings may shift as we shift the focus.<sup>59</sup>

Analysis can be looked at as a lens. The meanings and focus can shift our ideas, which plays into how we can see people in a particular context. Seeing what is said and how it's said, plays into creating a voice for people. In this chapter, I will explain how textual analysis allows us to understand how texts reveal the power in which they operate and how we can read the ways in which representation works. Therefore, in the following section, I will explain what textual analysis is, before I get into further detail about how it relates to representation and power.

### 3.2: What is Textual Analysis?

Textual analysis is explained by Alan McKee, in his book *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* as, “a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world.”<sup>60</sup> Text analysis can also represent or consist of various methodologies.

McKee further explains,

Academics who do 'textual analysis' actually practice a huge range of methodologies, many of which are mutually contradictory and incompatible. This book explains a form of 'textual analysis' whereby we attempt to understand the likely interpretations of texts made by people who consume them. This is not the only 'correct' methodology for gathering information about texts. Other approaches can also produce useful information: no approach tells us the 'truth' about a culture. It's important to realize that different methodologies will produce different kinds of information, even if they are used for analyzing similar questions.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Tvedt, Johanna N., "Accounting for Gender in International Refugee Law: A Close Reading of the UNHCR Gender Guidelines and the Discursive Construction of Gender as an Identity" (2013). Master's Theses. Paper 119.

<sup>60</sup> McKee, Alan. *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*. 2.: London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003., 2003. Ignacio: USF Libraries Catalog, EBSCOhost (accessed October 22, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

This statement shows that there are various ways to interpret textual information. Some of the various ways this can be done conducting large-scale surveys and interviews. However, when looking at the text, and seeing how it influences people and how they consume information, is important to try to understand and process the texts' deeper meanings. Text, when shaping an opinion, can have either positive or negative social effects. Norman Fairclough in his book *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* writes,

Text as elements of social events have causal effects. Most importantly, text can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitude, values and so forth. Their effects can include changes in the material world, such as changes in urban design, or the architecture and design of particular types of building. In sum, texts have causal effects upon, and contribute to changes in, people, actions, social relations, and the material world.<sup>62</sup>

The social effects that text can have in shaping views and opinions can either work in creating change or completely go against it. That is why gathering information and making sense of it can help when dealing with cultures.

Textual analysis in this a practice of understanding how texts use techniques and language to give meaning to the world. McKee explains,

Performing textual analysis, then, is an attempt to gather information about sense-making practices, not only in cultures radically different from our own, but also within our own nations. It allows us to see how similar or different the sense-making practices that different people use can be. And it is also possible that this can allow us to better understand the sense-making cultures in which we ourselves.<sup>63</sup>

This process of gathering information and making sense of it is important, so that we as readers are aware of the social construct and power structure within. Texts are meant to be looked at and

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<sup>62</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> McKee, Alan. *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*. 14.: London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003., 2003. Ignacio: USF Libraries Catalog, EBSCOhost (accessed October 22, 2016).

understood. We cannot automatically assume what it means, but we can make sense of it when we thoroughly try to understand how it is being used.

As readers, it is our job to not make presumptions about texts. We often give credit to the authors as if they are the master minds behind the research, when in reality the authors text can be opened up for more discussion in a cultural, historical and autobiographical context.<sup>64</sup> When freeing up the text from the author, there is more range of possibilities on how the text can produce meaning. Practically speaking, text cannot solely rely on the one who produces it, considering there are always misinterpretations and different ways readers can process the texts context all the time.<sup>65</sup> McKee points out in his book that textual analysis links with interpretation. However, he explains the complications that can come with representation.

The problem: there's no single correct representation of any part of the world and, in the same way, there's no single correct interpretation of any text. The ways in which members of different cultures may make sense of a text will vary just as much as the ways in which they make sense of the world around them. When you're doing textual analysis, you have to remember that different groups will probably have interpreted each text in different ways.<sup>66</sup>

Context in relation to language is needed when trying to understand meaning. Everyone has their own way of making sense of situations and understanding them, which means there's no right or wrong way to respond to textual analysis. Tvedt further explains the importance stating,

Marianne Constable builds on this insight by suggesting that the close reader should not only pay attention to specific arguments and definitions in the text, but also the manner in which they are offered – from the entire structure of the text to the choice of words. In short, a close reading should look for<sup>67</sup> “what is revealed in the use of particular language in particular texts”.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Nealon, Jeffrey, and Susan S. Giroux. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> McKee, Alan. *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*. 14th ed. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003. 2003. Ignacio: USF Libraries Catalog, EBSCOhost (accessed October 22, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Tvedt, Johanna N., "Accounting for Gender in International Refugee Law: A Close Reading of the UNHCR Gender Guidelines and the Discursive Construction of Gender as an Identity" (2013). Master's Theses. Paper 119.

<sup>68</sup> Constable, Marianne. *Just Silences: The Limits and Possibilities of Modern Law*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005.

The text can be strategically used and placed when trying to prove an argument. However, definition and arguments are not the main focus when looking at text. The language that is used can reveal meaning within the text.

There is a language behind the text and discourse that must be looked at as well which close readings can expose. Talk and texts are very much linked together. When analyzing the text, one of the goals is to be aware of the language. Talk and text are linked together and should not be overlooked. The meaning of text depends on the context. Studying what actual discourse looks like will show how rules are broken, ignored, changed, or violated within the textual functions.<sup>69</sup> This indicates how texts can have power and influence in a society. When advocating for people, texts and their meaning can drive people and influence the action and changes being done. It can influence the culture or idea, and the way the people think about or create change.

Although this approach can influence a societal change, which can have negative or positive effects, power can be exposed through text because of the power structure within it. Tvedt writes,

The close reading differs from the everyday reading in that it looks for and pays attention to such power structures contained within a text. The close reader looks for silences and omission, asks who is empowered and disempowered, and questions that which appears self-evident, and how the text establishes authority. The theoretical insights which underpin the methodology of close reading are that ideologies and evaluations are coded in language, which in turn has the power to shape our outlook and understanding of the topics discussed.<sup>70</sup>

Language has a strong influence on where one's opinions can lie. This notion of who responds first or has the access to establish authority can influence one's outlook on a situation. Which is why readings are not meant to be examined on the surface, but to be thoroughly looked at to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Tvedt, Johanna N., "Accounting for Gender in International Refugee Law: A Close Reading of the UNHCR Gender Guidelines and the Discursive Construction of Gender as an Identity" (2013). Master's Theses. Paper 119.

expose deeper ideologies. Texts can expose such authority, which is why contextual analysis was best suited to answer this research question, especially when looking at human rights organizations' authoritative role when stepping in to advocate on a cultural group's behalf. The following section will look at what techniques textual analysis entails and how to read between the lines, to look beyond where the power lies, and focus attention on where voices are lacking.

### **3.3: What to do when doing a Textual Analysis?**

While the previous section detailed what textual analysis is, this section described what one does when one performs a textual analysis. When conducting textual analysis, it must be looked at from various approaches. Language, definitions/justifications, context and images are all essential to look at when doing a complete text analysis. These were all analyzed in order to help answer my research question. For this research, understanding these parts of text analysis, helps to make it clearer to determine how power lies within text and influences cultural change. It also allows for there to be a clearer understanding of how human rights organizations use context as an advantage to accumulate an audience in order to create a cultural change.

#### **A. Language**

When doing a close reading, the goal is to get a better understanding of the language used and its meaning. Nealon and Giroux explain, "Language is a social system of meaning, reading is essentially the social production of a relation among a set of signifiers."<sup>71</sup> In other words, reading is not about identifying the text's "natural" meaning, but is more about

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<sup>71</sup> Nealon, Jeffrey, and Susan S. Giroux. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

producing and relating it to other discourses. For Nealon and Giroux, close textual analysis looks not just at what is said, but how it is said as well.

Nealon and Giroux reflect on this idea by applying it to social theory. They explain how it is necessary to look at the way theory works and reflect to on it. If we do not question the meaning and assume everything is natural, and already defined, then there is no point in challenging it.<sup>72</sup> “Everything comes from somewhere, exists, and functions in a particular context, set of contexts, there’s no such thing as a natural fact.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, as a reader, it is your job to investigate the language in order to find meaning. There is nothing in nature that tells us what is fact and what must be believed. There must be a time to be inquisitive to further grasp the what context means. Nealon and Giroux are not saying that theory requires one to model after a reading or the author behind it, but it is more about intervening and getting into the debate and discourse that does not seem to be open for discussion.<sup>74</sup> There is no “natural language”<sup>75</sup> that can get everyone to process context to get the exact same meaning.

Reading context requires more thought and has a variety of possibilities when it comes to reading. It is necessary to look at texts and to give a personal response. We cannot just take an author’s word without challenging the context to see if we agree or disagree. The same thing applies when looking at ways in which institutions justify their argument through text.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

## B. Definitions and Justification

The use of definitions to engage an audience is common, since it hides organizations' personal agenda. When analyzing text, it is essential to look for the arguments that rest within the context. Definitions and justifications are another way where organization can assert their own voice to appeal to audiences. It is more insightful to look deeper into the meaning and context, which is why using the method of textual analysis is best to answer how human rights organizations represent women.

Studying argumentation is helpful, considering people try to justify their missions and prove their legitimacy through text. Erik Doxtader writes,

The study of institutional argument involves an investigation of how institutions define their actions and how this mission is justified on the grounds of public interest. Such study is important because it both clarifies what it means to call something an institution and reveals how institutions use arguments to colonize the possibilities of public deliberation.<sup>76</sup>

Through argumentation, institutions claim to be working for the “public good”.<sup>77</sup> Working to gain public interest is the way to get people outside of institutions on their side. They strategically know how to get the public on their side. According to *Everything's an Argument with reading*, “Arguments lead to proposals for action when writers have succeeded in presenting the problem in such a compelling way that readers ask: What can we do?”<sup>78</sup> This phrase proves why it is important to evaluate text. Institutions may focus their attention on what may appear to be for the common good of people, but use it in a way that frames the debate in which they want it

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<sup>76</sup> Doxtader, Erik. “*Learning Public Deliberation Through the Critique of Institutional Argument*.” 4th ed. Vol. 31. 1995. <http://0-eds.aebsohost.com.ignacio.usfca.edu/eds/detail/detail?sid=e6609642-a2db-4fd9-aaff-2ababb830973%40sessionmgr4007&vid=2&hid=4113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#db=edsggr&AN=ed>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Lunsford, Andrea A., John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters. *Everything's an Argument with readings*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

focused. For a reader, reading context becomes more important in order to not get consumed by the bias that can come from the institutional texts.

Definitions and justifications are ways in which institutions get their arguments across. Institutions know how to engage audiences through their choice of definitions to create a larger movement.

In justifying their service, institutions necessarily depend on definitions of public interest. These definitions are important because they reveal how institutions conceptualize the value of public participation relative to the process of policy making. In other words, institutional arguments betray how management systems constellate pluralistic interest formation.

After looking at the arguments given in these materials, there should be more focus on what text requires the reader to think and believe and also the ideas that texts give. Tvedt states, “It becomes particularly important to look for that which appears “natural,” and how it works to empower some points of view, while disempowering others.”<sup>79</sup> It is essential to not allow one’s voice to create their own impression and impose it on the less powerful. Which is why it’s necessary to take action to dive into text and not allow it to dehumanize another. This notion helps to explain how organizations voices overpower the disempowered, and creates their own image to get audiences engaged.

### **C. Context**

Context is another component of textual analysis. When looking at context, it is important to look at it in detail. It can play a big role in social movements and in institutional usage. In

*Discourse as Structure and Process*, Teun A. Van Dijk states,

Text and talk in many ways signal their contextual relevance, and therefore context structures need to be observed and analyzed in detail, also as possible consequences of discourse: settings, participants and their communicative and social roles, goals and

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<sup>79</sup> Tvedt, Johanna N., "Accounting for Gender in International Refugee Law: A Close Reading of the UNHCR Gender Guidelines and the Discursive Construction of Gender as an Identity" (2013). Master's Theses. Paper 119.



relevant social knowledge, norms and values, institutional or organizational structures, and so on. Despite the general recognition of the importance of contextual analysis, this principle is unfortunately more preached than actually practiced.<sup>80</sup>

Context should not be overlooked, since it can shape a society's knowledge on a topic. When using context for information, it is necessary to look at the power it has to shape ones' opinion on an issue. Nealon and Giroux add to this idea by saying, "context also suggests ways in which reading can be an open-minded process of interpretation, without necessarily being an 'anything goes' war of ununiformed opinions."<sup>81</sup> This means that there is always room to add to the discussion. As mentioned by Van Dijk, because context is strong enough to shape a society's opinion, it should also allow a reader to add to the conversation. When looking at human rights organizations and the context they use to create goals and social roles in the garment industry, it exposes the relevance they have when creating a cultural change. The context they provide has a strong influence when seeking to highlight issues in an industry with a multitude of problems, in which they seek to help create change. The way context is communicated creates a powerful message to an audience; the same can be said when looking at images.

#### **D. Images**

Images also create their own rhetoric through compelling content.<sup>82</sup> Images can be used to draw in an audience when addressing an event. Davi Johnson describes images in *Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event*,

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<sup>80</sup> Dijk, Teun A. *Discourse as Structure and Process Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Vol. 1. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

<sup>81</sup> Nealon, Jeffrey, and Susan S. Giroux. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Johnson, Davi. "Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 2007., 1, *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 2, 2016).

An “image event” is a type of rhetorical address that is ocular, rather than verbal. Image events are often orchestrated by social movements, and they are defined as deliberately staged spectacles designed to attract attention of the mass media and disseminate persuasive images wide audience.<sup>83</sup>

Images can have a long lasting impact that can capture the attention of an audience. Using images in a social movement not only allows the audience to be drawn to the movement, but it persuades them to take a stance behind the institutions that are producing the images. Johnson further explains using Martin Luther King as an example, saying he understood how to use the power of visual rhetoric.<sup>84</sup> Making oppression or hardships apparent can draw one’s attention to an issue and create a social movement. Images often have a long- lasting impact to an audience when the sentimental aspect is there. The same can be said when looking at the garment industry. Images of women garment workers in poor working conditions can compel an audience to want to help the cause. These depictions are equally powerful as context. Doing a close analysis on how these images are used, just like context, allows us as readers to question and interpret how it was used as a social movement in favor of these institutions. It allows us to see the value it has especially when connecting it to overall themes of power and representation.

### **3.4: What is the Value of doing a Text Analysis?**

Textual analysis contributes to finding deep rooted agendas within texts. It helps to expose concepts and interpretations that are easily overlooked or kept at surface level meaning. For this research, textual analysis has helped to reveal two main concepts. First, textual analysis shows how power separates in the organization. Second, textual analysis helps to see how representation works for or against women.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

When researching human rights discourse, power is a common topic that comes up, since it typically entails groups that are mistreated or underrepresented. It is important to understand who has power and who has less representation in order to expose where change is needed. Conducting a textual analysis coincides with finding where power influences human rights organizations and institutions to deliberate on behalf of another group. It is important for readers to think critically about the information they are receiving. It is necessary to see that there are strategies used when trying to compel audiences. When there is power within the text, it allows for the institutions to have control on how they want stories to be portrayed. It is not to say that their intentions are to redirect from the problem, but it allows for them to focus the audience's attention on the facts and information they find relevant when working to change the cause, instead of what might actually be necessary for changing it. Without textual analysis, there would be no understanding of the power relations text has, which would only continue a cycle of keeping the marginalized groups under the power of the institutions. This would ultimately continue to make representation of people very one sided, which leads to the second point of understanding how representation works.

Providing text analysis also helps there to be a clearer understanding of representation. Without it, there would be no way of understanding how organizations use images, context, and definitions when creating global initiatives. This method allows us to see the ins and outs of how advocates work on behalf of people, whether it be for their common interest or not. This means that there is a significance when allowing oneself to be part of the conversation and possibilities when trying to expose how a system works. Challenging the dynamics of how institutions represent groups because of the power of engaging in the close reading process, allows the

broader issues to be exposed, which helps in the process of applying analysis when compiling data.

### **3.5: Applying the Methods**

In looking at how human rights organizations represent women in the garment industry, I analyze the way women are represented in text by human rights organizations and the way women are advocated for by their organizations. Specifically, I look at the ways in which the text establishes the problems in the garment industry and the roles organizations take to create policy or cultural change. From there, I look at how human rights organizations employ the voices of the women for whom they are advocating. Through this, I try to show how within the text, women's voices are strategically used or not used at all in the process of changing the garment industry, whether it be on site or at a government level. Finally, I look at organizations voices in the industry in relation to the lack of women's voices and the effect that has when trying to create change.

In this process, I will analyze seven texts. I will look at Human Rights Watch, Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), International Labour Organization (ILO), Alliance for Bangladesh Safety, International Labor Rights Forum, Solidarity Center, and Bangladesh Women's Foundation. I have chosen these specific texts because they are some of the main contributors when it comes to the garment industry and have the most powerful influences on the changes that happen on the ground and at a policy level. They represent a wide range of organizations, like Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Employer's Federation (BKMEA), Clear Voice Hotline Service: Building better Factories for Workers and Management and many more. In comparison to the CCC and ILO, these

organization focus on more specific tasks within the garment industry, which makes it easier for them to join forces with larger campaigns like the CCC and ILO to represent them in all together in one unit. Their voices not only influence the public and audiences they are trying to reach, but they also have the most connections when it comes to working with workers and the government. They all invest plenty of time into the garment industry and show that through their websites with the images and context they provide.

I plan on using these texts by looking at the images, arguments, context, terms, and justifications they use when discussing women in the industry. Using this approach, I try to unveil how women garment worker's voices are taken for granted when trying to create a change. Finally, I sum this up by providing recommendations on how to incorporate women, instead of organizations using them for their own benefit or not at all.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis Piecing the Material Together**

Human rights organizations have taken it upon themselves to handle tasks in the garment industry. From pressuring companies to take responsibility and pay compensation, to working with the Bangladeshi government to create policy change, organizations have been the forerunners in the garment industry. However, what seems to be lacking are organizations making full use of women's narratives. Workers narratives seem to be missing or hardly represented when looking at organizations' campaigns. In this chapter, I argue that human rights organizations represent women, but they frame women's stories in a way that supports their claims. This proposes that women's narratives are being structured in a way that is not enabling their progression, but human rights organizations, which is critical when looking at how women's narrative are utilized in the garment industry. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this chapter will look at seven human rights organizations and use of images, context, argumentations and justification to analyze how women's narratives are utilized and represented through these human rights organizations.

Before analyzing the data, it is necessary to get an understanding of the mission and work these organizations do. This is important because we need to see the various ways and approaches organizations use to represent women, considering they all are working for the same cause, but approach it in different ways. Each organization has their own specialties and foci, which is helpful to understand when looking at the way they choose to represent women and their voices. Also, some of them partner together, which is key when looking at the tactics they use to make claims to support their missions, as they work individually and together.

### *Human Rights Watch*

Human Rights Watch is an organization that focuses on universal human rights issues. Their mission is to bring awareness to the violations and crimes against humanity. Their stance in Bangladesh's garment industry has been prevalent because they document and investigate the issues to provide stronger policies and promote equality. They provide reports and updates on the issues to show what's being done. Considering they are a larger organization, their voice is prevalent since their primary job is to focus on finding the evidence to make their claims stronger. They go utilize interviews and photos to represent what is happening and what is being said by the victims. Human Rights Watch investigation skills put them in an interactive position to get the details they need to create change in the industry.

From Human Rights Watch, I analyze their report *Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry*. This report was produced in April of 2015, but the interviews were conducted in October of 2013 a few months after the Rana Plaza factory collapse. I also look at their following report *Bangladesh: Protect Garment Workers'* which was published February 2014, which followed up to the previous report and provided more eyewitness statements and interviews. These timeframes show the quick response that Human Rights Watch had in trying to get the evidence they needed for their own mission. Both report not only has compelling interviews, but also have images which provides a visual behind the words the organizations and the interviewees speak on. These descriptive interviews and images gives a reader deep understanding of what is happening in the garment industry, which compels a striking emotion for the readers to support the cause. These reports also show women voices are present and shows how Human Rights Watch uses them in relation to their own mission.

### *International Labour Organization*

The International Labour Organization focuses solely on improving working conditions in the garment industry. They focus on creating long and short term plans and strategies to create safer work spaces for women. Their goal is to work with the government and the workers themselves to get the working conditions that workers need and desire. Their site gears its attention to making sure workers are going to a safe work environment and they use images to display such improvement. They are also known for having a big ring of partnering organizations to work with them on their mission to create projects that will aid in their long and short term plans.

In the International Labor Organization, I explore their entire website. I look at their mission, publications and their overall information they provide on Bangladesh's garment industry. Their site provides information on their plans and projects they are implementing to improve work conditions. This overall is all about making sure women have the working conditions they need and safe environments, since the government and factory managers are not taking on those tasks as quickly as they should. I not only look at their mission and plans they work on, but at the images they provide that work in the best favor of their organization as a reflection of what their work is capable of providing to these women garment workers.

### *International Labor Rights Forum*

When looking at the International Labor Rights Forum, their mission is to work for and with the people. They are focused on putting pressure on companies to pay compensation to the workers. They take action and work fast to get workers the money and services they need. They also collaborate with other organizations, such as Clean Clothes Campaign to get work done.



These collaborations are key when looking at the ways both organizations work together to represent women when they seek to create more pressure on the government and create change more quickly in the garment industry.

With this, I specifically look at their website and their report *Rana Plaza 3 Years On: Compensation, Justice and Women's Safety*, which they collaborate with Clean Clothes Campaign and published three years after the Rana Plaza tragedy. I look at the ways in which they claim to work for and with the people and utilize women in their mission. Their site and report shows the legal cases and claims that have been made, which I look to see if they use women in their reports and as evidence in their cases.

#### *Solidarity Center*

Solidarity Center focuses on the wages workers receive. Their mission is to make sure that there is economic and social justice provided when discussing the economy and garment industry issues. They help to give workers a voice especially when helping them form and create unions. They also provide training for women to be able to be more empowered to challenge the government and companies and management that deny them their rights.

I specifically look at their entire website and how they highlight women through their images and videos. Their site shows certain encourages the audience to give to the cause through their photos. Unlike other organizations, they display happier photos and videos that help support their mission in creating a stronger and flourishing garment industry.

#### *Clean Clothes Campaign*

Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is all about helping the global garment industry. They take on various approaches when representing women. They focus on the working conditions, policy changes, gender equality and collaborating with other workers. Their mission attempts to

create an overall change in the garment industry and promotes changing the lives of women workers. They are a powerful driver in the garment industry and often partner with other organizations to put pressure on companies and government. They promote themselves as a very capable force for getting the government and clothing companies involved in taking ownership.

With this organization, I look at their entire website and their report *Rana Plaza 3 Years On: Compensation, Justice and Women's Safety*, that they collaborated with the International Labor Rights Forum. Their site argues in support of giving workers benefits from clothing companies and promoting their rights. Considering the CCC is a leading force in the garment industry, I will look at how they represent women in their mission to improve working and living standards.

#### *Bangladesh Women's Foundation*

In comparison to the other organizations, Bangladesh Women's Foundation, is smaller in terms of size and global connectedness with other organizations. Their mission is to invest in women to become leaders in order to have positive lifestyles. They are not as outspoken in their mission nor post annual updates like the other organizations, but they focus on funding women to be in an equal society and become leaders. This is important because they are not looking to just help women and talk about their issues, but are more focused on creating leaders within these communities, which creates a greater impact and a long lasting change for the women.

On their site, I will specially look at their mission and how they plan on helping women. In their mission, they focus on empowering women and creating leaders. They want to implement leaders at a grassroots level to create change and leaders within communities. They argue that creating leaders is the best way to create a change and have representatives at a local level. This

is helpful when looking to see how they will mobilize women's voice and use do it in a way that makes them a stronger force in the garment industry.

#### *Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety*

Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety takes a different approach from the other organizations. Not only do they work to help workers receive compensation and benefits, but they also provide hotlines where workers can call in about safety concerns and voice their opinions without getting hurt. They focus on hearing these demands and concerns and promote executing them in a timely fashion. They also work with retailers, companies and brands to come together so create more transparency from all angles to provide more solutions to move forward.

From Alliance for Bangladesh Women's Safety, I look at their entire website. They provide updates and reports regularly to show the improvements that are taking place in the industry. Considering they want to help workers and focus on the impact of the progress their organization makes, I search for the women workers in the industry who have benefited from this work and their thoughts on the work that has happened. The organization wants there to be education and empowerment for the workers, so it is essential to see this on their site when looking to see how organizations are representing women and try to create a way to give them a voice and power in the garment industry.

### **4:1 How Organizations Are Representing Women?**

Human rights organizations are there to represent people who are not able to be heard or who do not have access to such opportunities. When looking at the work organizations do, we can see how they present outlets for women to be able to be heard and present a space for their narratives. Their goal is to build moments of identification for audiences to be involved with the issues. We can explore how organizations use women voices by looking at various ways they

allow women's voices to appear and the spaces created by organizations to present their voices to the public. I assert that through articles and videos, human rights organizations use this as an opportunity to call audiences to take action and get involved in their cause. Organizations create these moments to help identify for the audience that there is an action that need to occur.

#### **4.A. How do Women's' Voices Appear?**

Organizations present women's voices in a few ways. One of them is through interviews. Organizations conduct interviews to help workers be able to express their concerns, since human rights organizations would be the safest space for that to happen. Interviews are conducted and allow women to speak for themselves. Human Rights Watch wrote, "Before each interview we informed the interviewee of its purpose and asked whether he or she wanted to participate."<sup>85</sup> We see from this quotation that there was an option presented for people to speak out. Organizations leave an option for workers to participate if they want their stories to be heard. Organizations also allow parts of their narratives to be presented within certain sections or claims they are making. For example, Human Rights Watch presented an entire section on their site titled *Bangladesh: Protect Garment Workers' Rights*, which continued workers' statements from various factories. Although their identities were protected for safety purposes, their concerns were able to be presented.<sup>86</sup> Interviews are an effective for workers to have a statement of what they want and for outside audiences to have a closer connection to the actual victim's stories.

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<sup>85</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories.15.: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>86</sup> "Bangladesh: Protect Garment Workers' Rights." Human Rights Watch (February 6, 2014). <http://hrw.org/news/2014/02/06/bangladesh-protect-garment-workers-rights>.

This is also seen within highlighted stories organizations have on their sites. Highlighted stories allow for organizations to follow garment workers into their lives and share their personal struggles. They can either present a specific worker's story or various workers. They are featured through articles and videos, which create a personal connection between the audience with the workers and their stories. Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) such featured, *Shila Begum: A Survivor's Story*, what it shows the intensity of severe accident from the power of voice of a worker,

#### Shila Begum – Survivor's Story

Shila Begum had been working in a factory within Rana Plaza for over two years when she reluctantly entered the building on April 24th last year. Within minutes of sitting behind her sewing machine the electricity went off and the generator kicked in. Then the building came crashing down.

"I felt a shock and the floor gave way. People started running in chaos and the ceiling came down. I kept protecting my head, but I got stuck between the rubble. My hand got stuck and I thought I would die. People around died."

Shila lay trapped in the rubble for a full day, like many of those around her she was screaming out for help. Finally, at 5pm someone came to rescue them.

"They tried to pull the concrete plates that were on top of us. From both side of the plates people were pulling me and they managed to get me out. [But] the weight of the concrete had pulled my uterus. At 11pm they removed my uterus completely."<sup>87</sup>

This featured story shows that women's stories are available and quite powerful. Hearing a garment worker discuss how people around them died and the moments of chaos they experienced just before being trapped in a building and almost getting killed is compelling. It creates a moment for the audience to see that there is an issues that need to be identified which compels them to take action. Organizations do present the chance for women to speak out, and do not overlook the individuals. Along with the featured story, the CCC presented a photo of Shila, which also shows how organizations do allow the women to be seen and heard. Visual representation is also

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<sup>87</sup> "Improving working conditions in the global garment industry." *Clean Clothes Campaign*.  
<https://cleanclothes.org/safety/ranaplaza>.

important because it give the narrative a face. Seeing the women and connecting their stories to their voices makes the stories more compelling.

International Labor Rights Forum show videos of workers and their day to day life in the garment industry. These compelling videos show women talking about the factory disasters they experienced and discuss the people they lost. It also allows a visual of the environment women describe and see in relation to what they are interviewed about and concerns they present. Highlighted stories do not just highlight the women who are willing to share their stories, but also allow the audience to put a face, voice, and name to the workers. This kind of representation again reminds us that organizations want to link a face to the story and allow the audience to have a deeper connection to the issues, which demands a space for the audience to pay attention.

#### **4.B. How Organizations Create Spaces**

Organizations present women stories in a fashion where they try to create a space. This space is there for the women to be heard and for the audience to pay attention. We see this space through the way in which organizations present women's stories. For example, when looking at an organization's site they provide sections that will have photos of the garment industry's poor conditions, or have some specific areas where women's narratives are displayed. Human Rights Watch provides such spaces in their journal *Bangladesh: Protect Garment Workers' Rights*, where they have an entire section for worker interviews.

##### **Worker interviews:**

##### **Factory 1**

Female worker:

One of the main problems I had with the factory was that it was very dirty. One time I even found leeches in the drinking water container, and there was no space to eat so we had to take our lunches and eat in the toilet.

We started to organize the union in July. When we took the registration form to the owner he threw it in the dustbin. He said that he would spend lots of money to stop the union from being formed. He said he would bribe the police and hire thugs. So we felt really scared.

In total there were 14 organizers. Two of them were beaten. One woman was attacked with cutting shears. Then some men came to my house. This was about 15-20 days after we submitted the forms. There was one *mastan* [gangster] as well as the owner's brother and some other staff. The *mastan* said, "if you do not leave your job we will do something serious to you, so take your money, take two months' pay, and go away." I was terrified and so I agreed. I signed the resignation letter and was given the money. Whoever raises their heads suffers the most.

## **Factory 2**

Male worker 1:

I was elected the president of my trade union by my colleagues and we started to organize confidentially. But one day the floor supervisor found out. He started to threaten me. He said, "you will be killed by the owners." He then slapped me in the face, insulted me, and said I would lose my job.

We registered our union on September 29, 2013. We haven't lost our jobs but the workers who are union members are suffering a lot. They have increased the amount of work that all of us have to complete. If we don't finish the work, they insult us. This situation forced one of our colleagues to resign.<sup>88</sup>

Here we see an entire section that is dedicated to worker interviews. These interviews are the exact statements that Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted for men and women workers to speak out on the issues they face as garment workers. HRW created a specific section for workers stories to not only validate the issues the organization is trying to make claims for, but to create a space that solely focuses on and shows how workers are able to be heard and have an entire section focused on their voices.

We can also see this on a personal level between organizations and the women as well.

"The Alliance is committed to providing factory workers with the opportunity to voice safety concerns so that they can be heard and acted upon in a timely manner. The Alliance Worker Helpline—Amader Kotha ("Our Voice") in Bangla—provides workers with a reliable 3rd-party

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<sup>88</sup> "Bangladesh: Protect Garment Workers' Rights." Human Rights Watch (February 6, 2014). <http://hrw.org/news/2014/02/06/bangladesh-protect-garment-workers-rights>.

reporting channel that will allow them to raise safety concerns anonymously.”<sup>89</sup> Here we see having these innovative outlets for women creates not only a safe space for women, but shows the audience that these existing spaces are beneficial in helping the overall cause. These spaces are relevant because we see that women can be heard and get some of their requests addressed in a timely fashion. Organizations like Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety show they do create a space where their stories can be acknowledged and the audience can connect to the issue. Having these spaces not only shows that women’s voices are not completely suppressed, but it shows the demand for the audience that there is a need to pay attention to the problems and connect to individuals.

#### **4.2: Potential Limitations**

Although organizations want to help women and create space to allow progression in the garment industry, there are potential limitations that come with such work. In this section, I argue that by using women’s stories as evidence, using images, and organizations focusing on their personal missions have a downside when trying to represent women. Since there is structure on how and where women are displayed by organizations, limitations are formed from this. These potential limits can hinder giving women the potential exposure they need to be the forerunners in vocalizing their own concerns in the industry. The following section will look into the potential limitations that organizations cause when representing women, to point out how they hinder women voices from reaching their full potential when vocalizing issues in the industry.

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<sup>89</sup> "Worker Helpline." *Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety*. <http://www.bangladeshworkersafety.org/what-we-do/worker-helpline>.



#### 4.A. Women's Stories as Evidence

Evidence is provided when organizations want to prove facts within the garment industry. This evidence is often seen when organizations try to create change either through policy or culture. Organizations use the evidence in order to make their claims stronger. One of the ways they present evidence is by using women's stories. Organizations have taken it upon themselves to interview women and ask specific questions with which they can make a strong claim. This use of women's voices to make claims is often categorized. For instance, looking at Human Rights Watch, women's stories are often placed under specific sections where they try to make their claim stronger. As stated in the "Non-Payment or Late Payment of Wages and Benefits" section of their book *Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Factories*,

Workers in almost all of the factories complained that managers did not pay wages on benefits in full or on time. This included pay for overtime, maternity benefits, the Eid holiday bonus, and compensation for working during vacations. For example, Nazimuddin, "They didn't give us the yearly bonus, they didn't give us a yearly increment, they didn't give us money for earned leave. Basically, the factory management didn't ever follow the labor law."<sup>90</sup>

This is just one of the few narratives used within this section of wages. In this statement, we see a strong claim presented from a worker about not receiving work benefits. This claim not only presents worker narrative and gives evidence to the issues, but it also supports what the organizations are claiming in the section. The section continues on with other factory workers' statements to support their claims in the section. The following section in the text repeats the same technique. Under the Workplace Discrimination and Challenges for Pregnant Women section,

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<sup>90</sup> Whoever Raises their Head Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry Factories. 22-25: Human Rights Watch, 2015.

A female worker at a Dhaka- based factory employing over 400 people told Human Rights Watch that women workers that were humiliated when they asked for their benefits: “In our factory, 80 percent of workers are female and they will get pregnant, but the managers are not doing anything about maternity leave and bonuses. When we protested about it, our supervisors used really bad words against us, such as: “If you’re all concentrating on fucking, why are you working here? Go and work in a brothel.””<sup>91</sup>

This displays the harsh language managers say to women. This shows the discrimination that women face directly as factory workers, which also best represents the claim the organizations make under their section titles. Again, we see the responses given are categorized by subject. When organizations try to prove their claims are relevant, they place them where they can be read clearly to the audience. Each section attempts to validate the case they are presenting in order to gain audience support. Clean Clothes Campaign and The International Labor Rights Forum use the same structure. In *The Rana Plaza 3 Years On: Compensation, Justice Workers' Safety* explicitly states,

A series of interviews with workers conducted by the International Labor Organization and Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity, which primarily intended to focus on experiences with fire and building safety programs, revealed that the priority safety issues mattered to workers included the freedom to form trade unions and bargain collectively, without facing retaliation and violence, as well as the ability to be safe from sexual harassment and abuse.<sup>92</sup>

This text exemplifies that interviews and stories are used and categorized, meaning that there was strategy used to focus the interviews by subject matter. These categories only help to break down the story for organizations to generate narratives where they need them. This subjectivity keeps their claims strong and validates the women’s voices with their own mission.

Organizations also engage the audience to be on their side, since they organize and gear their

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign and International Labor Rights Forum. "Rana Plaza 3 Years On: Compensation, Justice, Workers' Safety."

evidence in a way to help their claims. Using women's voices as evidence is not the only way organizations present a problem; they also use images.

#### **4.B.: Images: Sentiment or Strategy?**

Images can also be categorized to appeal to an audience. Capturing an emotion, whether it is sentimental or to get the audiences involvement, is a powerful tool. Photos are often used by organizations in one of two ways. One is by using images in a way that would strike an emotion for an audience, another is by placing the images within certain categories to engage the audience. Organizing pictures in relation to what text says and using images as proof to verify the text appeals to the audience and gets them to react and respond in a certain fashion, whether it is to give money or to get involved with the organization. These strategies play a vital role, considering images are equally as powerful as content. Human Rights Watch, International Labor Organization, International Labor Rights Forum, and Solidarity Center, use imagery in multiple ways to compel an audience.

When looking at the background of Bangladesh garment industry and the incidents that took place, sad images are used. They are often images of workers that were killed by a building collapse or are of dead garment workers and their families. They also display the poor working conditions that workers experience within the factories. Human Rights Watch uses those compelling images right away when introducing the issues in the industry. When looking at their site, the first image is very compelling and immediately creates an audience reaction, whether it is sad or angry.

Figure 1, shows a picture of a women missing a limb with a look of distress and defeat on her face. She is facing the camera directly, exposing her body for the audience to see the impact the building collapse had on her body. The darker background highlights her missing arm from a

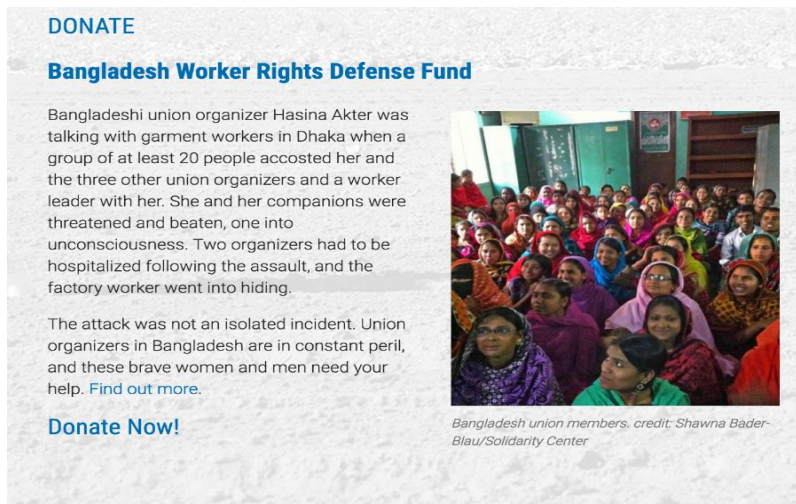


Figure 1: Source-Human Rights Watch

factory collapse and emphasizes the frame that she holds with her other arm. Within the frame the picture displays her two young children, who are too young to not have a mother around. From this image, we can infer that she is in dire need of aid and protection in order for her to have a better life for her and her kids. These kinds of images, immediately draw the reader in

to feel sentimental and strike an emotion. It immediately persuades the reader to want to learn more about the mother to these children and the topic, since it shows a single mom struggling for her rights. International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) has used the same tactics. When discussing the industry and describing the hardships of the working conditions, the ILRF displays photos of collapsed buildings falling and the mass destruction that happens. These leading images once again draws one to the problems in a particular area or focus in which the organization wants to make change. Especially when asking for audiences to donate.

Donation pages often display a completely different image of workers. When looking at the images it often portrays happy workers with big smiles on their faces sitting together, demonstrating this idea of an overall healthy and happy work environment. They either portray workers working in the factories or show a big group picture of workers smiling as demonstrated



in Figure 2. Solidarity Center, places these kinds of images next to their bright blue “donate now” button. This kind of imagery gives the impression that if donors contribute their funds that these are the kinds of photos and lifestyle changes that can be created. It engages the audience to want to give from the opening pictures they saw of sad,

Figure 2: Source- Solidarity Center

distressed women in horrible conditions. to the end pictures of happy workers in healthy conditions. The idea is that their money can provide and help in these transitioning photos.

These images are also common when organizations talk about their missions. Clean Clothes Campaign and the International Labor Organization use these same images when they describe their organizations missions. For instance, Clean Clothes Campaign and the International Labor Organization under their “About Us” sections, where they describe their missions and goals for the garment industry showing images of happy women workers. Underneath the photos of the happy women workers, one of the photos reads on the International Labor Organization website “Beneficiaries of the ILO skills training.”<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> "Area of Work." *International Labour Organization*. <http://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Areasofwork/lang--en/index.htm>.

In Figure 3, we see two women garment workers with huge smiles on their faces as the women on the right has an apron on that says “fire fighter.” The caption only shows and says that these organizations can create this image through their services. It gives the audience the



*Beneficiaries of the ILO skills training ©ILO*

Figure 3: Source- International Labour Organization

impression that being a part of this organizations’ movement is the best way for there to be more smiling garment workers and that safety precautions will be in full affect. This persuasion allows an audience to think that this is the kind of situation that organizations can produce and they are the best solution to the problem. It compels the audience to want

to learn more about the mission that organizations take on when working in the industry.

However, there also is a lack of context given in the photos. There is an “inferred meaning” in the way organizations use the photos, but we can’t determine the actual scenario happening. We can only see a particular expression or mood used to depict the subjects’ context and to emphasize the claim the organization is making, but that is not enough to determine any of their full context.

Looking at images only gives a small glimpse of the women. We only see the images that organizations choose and frame in their own way. They place these images in a way that support their own claim. This limits women once again from having say and contributing to what they want to communicate. This only shows the power that organizations have and that they are have

more control in vocalizing and presenting what they want the reader to do instead of giving voice to the women themselves.

#### **4.C.: Whose Mission?**

When organizations discuss their work and mission, they use certain justifications and terminology. They emphasize their commitment to changing the industry and promote their work in a way that makes the reader feel as if that organization is the main source for improving the garment industry. They often set goals for what they want to see changed. Rarely is there a narrative for what the workers want to see changed.

Clean Clothes Campaign, Bangladesh Women's Foundation, and the International Labour Organization, often display their mission for the industry by using terms such as "our mission," "our vision," and "skills." These terms all express the work that they bring to the industry and promote the changes that occur when they are involved. The "areas of work" section on the International Labour Organization's page states, "The ILO works to improve the national enabling environment for industry skills and development and the increased employability of young and adult women and men."<sup>94</sup> In this statement we see they present their skills to show what they are capable of alternating in the industry. Clean Clothes Campaign expressed the same interest saying, "we are committed to improving the lives and working conditions of all workers." They make it their job to commit themselves and often follow these statements up with lists of their own personal goals and aspirations, and follow up with statements that say, "The CCC will do all in its power to make these rights a reality for women working in the garment and sportswear industry."<sup>95</sup> This comes off as a very powerful source. It

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

gives the impression that their efforts will make an influence in the industry more than other outside sources.

These organizations mention their own ambitions they plan to put into practice. They often place their goals within a list of what they want have happen. Clean Clothes Campaign writes,

**To put our aspirations into practice the CCC will:**

- foster solidarity and promote links between the women who buy clothes, the women who produce clothes and the women who sell clothes;
- collaborate with the international labor movement and with women's organizations to win rights for women workers and empower women to join and take leadership positions in unions, community and workers' organizations;
- engage with NGOs, the media and research communities to focus attention on the working conditions of women working in the garment and sportswear industry;
- urge companies and supply chain employers to ensure that all garment workers can access their human and legal rights, particularly women's rights to Decent Work and equal pay;
- press the international and policy communities, as well as national governments, to take greater account of the importance of Decent Work and international labor standards in programs aiming to economically empower women in garment producing countries;
- promote understanding and learning on gender issues so that policy and priorities reflect the commitment to make the world a better place for women working in the garment and sportswear value chain;
- increase awareness among consumers, especially young women, of the relationship between the clothes they buy and the lives of the women workers who produce them, as well as the benefits of ethical consumerism and 'slow' fashion which values quality of production over quantity;
- provide resources to assist the CCC network and other stakeholders to develop effective strategies to challenge gender inequality;
- conduct research using a gender-sensitive approach, including in research design, methodologies, and analysis, producing outputs that include gender-disaggregated statistics and findings;
- ensure that our own internal practices and ways of working reflect our commitment to gender equality.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign. "Gender Policy Statement." <http://www.cleanclothes.org/issues/gender-policy-statement>.



This list validates the desires that these organizations have. Here we see the organization says the CCC will conduct research, the CCC will foster, and the CCC will promote something. This list only reiterates what they focus attention more to their own interest instead of the interest of the women which only prevents women from having more of a voice. Not once do their sites discuss how to help women put their aspirations into practice. Instead, we see desires that will help to build the organizations voice and satisfaction more so than the women they are advocating on behalf of. Bangladesh Women's Foundation provides some of the same general ideas in a list like the Clean Clothes Campaign to show their personal goals. This is not to say organizations should not set a goal. It only becomes a problem when its aspirations are put before the women workers and display no narrative of what the women themselves desire to see changed.

These personal mission promotions make it difficult to hear the aspirations of the women. The voice of the organization takes over more than the women. It allows the audience to follow the organization's path more so than the women on the ground who need to be heard. We see who has a bigger voice and who takes a stance when trying to promote change.

#### **4.D.: Summary**

Having analyzed how human rights organizations represent women and the potential limitations there are when they do, we see strategies used to get audience involvement through text, definitions, and images. Organizations manipulate subjects by projecting certain ideas to create stronger claims. This is not to say they don't have good intentions, considering the space and outlets they have created a way for women to be heard. However, the aspect missing is they do not focus on how they use women's stories. They are not cautious of how they frame

women's voices. This framing hinders women's voices from being projected in a way that cannot allow progression.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion Sewing it Together**

In doing a textual analysis of human rights organizations, I have argued that organizations do work on behalf of women garment workers and for the workers, but they frame their voices, which can hinder progress from being made in the garment industry. I assert that they do create spaces for women to be heard, but might in some instances frame their narratives in a way that only supports their own personal claims. In doing this, they use women's voices as evidence, use captivating images to capture the audience and focus on supporting their own personal missions, which can also minimize women from being capable of presenting their own concerns to create change in the garment industry. It limits women's voices from being a powerful force in changing the garment industry and only creates dependency where women cannot be heard unless outside organizations are involved. Through this framework of words, images, and context, it reveals how representing women's narratives in a way that does not misrepresent, erase, and mobilize their voices is extremely complex.

In the previous chapter, I presented two ideas. One was how organizations represent women and the other was the potential limitations organizations have on women voices when representing them. The purpose of this chapter is to look at theoretical implications and practical implications. When discussing the theoretical implications, it will discuss the importance of understanding how women's voices are framed. If organizations are not aware of framing narrative, it can take away women's voices and can impede actually empowering them. When looking at the practical implications, I will discuss how my thesis contributes to human rights organization and how they work with women to create change.

Drawing from this notion that framing can take away voices of the people and support organizations, I have argued that understanding textual analysis is essential when representing

women workers and making sure they have a voice. I ultimately suggest that it is more than just understanding framing and content, but it is about challenging, analyzing and interpreting what is being said in order to help empower women workers and allow more exposure of their voices to create more equality between them and the organizations.

### **5.1: Framing**

In doing a textual analysis, I have outlined the ways that organizations frame women's voices in the garment industry. In this section, I take a closer look at the concepts of framing and how it relates when discussing women's voices. In order to understand framing, we must know what it means. According to Perloff, framing has different components,

To appreciate framing, it is helpful to differentiate it from two related concepts previously discussed: agenda-setting and priming. All three concepts explain how political media can influence citizens in subtle ways. All three also highlight cognitive effects, pointing to how media exert an impact on how individuals think about politics. But there are differences that might elude us if we lump them together.<sup>97</sup>

This tells us that framing and its various concepts have effects on the way people react. This example shows that whether it is media or an organization promoting ideas, they can all shape an audience's opinion. We must be aware and see how frames are used to sway the public. We also see agenda-setting and priming are related to framing but have different goals. Agenda-setting focuses more on the coverage of issues and "priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments. It is often understood as an extension of agenda

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<sup>97</sup> Perloff, Richard M. *The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and Politics in the Digital Age*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

setting.”<sup>98</sup> These two ideas are more focused on keeping certain issue relevant in people’s minds, which can essential open the door for people to shape an opinion from the issues being discussed. Framing is more focused on how the news or organization displays information and the influence it has when audiences process the information.

This is evident when looking at the organizations in the previous chapter. After analyzing the pictures of Human Rights Watch or the International Labour Organization, we saw the images used and the images that the organizations choose in order to spark an emotion from the audience. We saw the way in which women’s narratives were displayed for the audience to process the information in a certain way. It was presented in order to get the audience to think in a certain way. Framing helps to explain the hegemony that media organizations have. Perloff further explains, “A frame is the central organizing theme that is employed to lend meaning to political events. Framing involves certain facets of issues and weaving connections so that particular interpretations and remedies are promoted.”<sup>99</sup> This reminds us that there are tactics to framing. Framing is meant to promote a certain response. The tactic use tries to focus the audience opinion in one direction, without letting the audiences’ ideas intervene. Perloff uses the example of politics and how being in a democratic society, key elites manipulate the public opinion.<sup>100</sup> This kind of manipulation is powerful when swaying policy or voting; the same there when discussing the garment industry. Organizations can use framing to help when they want to implement a policy or when trying to aid their own personal mission. This can engage the audience to be more focused on the organization instead of the garment workers.

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<sup>98</sup> Scheufele, Dietram A., and David Tewksbury. "Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models." *Journal of communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): 9-20.

<sup>99</sup> Perloff, Richard M. *The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and Politics in the Digital Age*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

This power is very influential when looking at the way women are presented and important to understand that it has become embedded in the system organizations use, which is why it is essential that they collaborate so that women are empowered. For scholars who are studying international human rights, it is crucial to not let personal missions overshadow women. Framing can only hinder their progression. There must be an awareness of and balance between what organizations say and how they say it so that women workers can become leading forces.

## 5.2: When Two Worlds Collide

When discussing practicality, it is essential to understand what it means for human rights organizations to work with women workers. When looking at the work humanitarians do, we see that they focus on creating an overall improvement in the garment industry. As noted in earlier chapters, humanitarians do find it to be their job to respond to issues in the garment industry. Scholars who study the garment industry are aware of the problems and are often swift to respond. They determined what they felt was the best solution for the garment industry and presented solutions to problems; however, they did this without fully collaborating with the women themselves. Robert Ross reminds us that “Workers themselves, we have said, are the best inspectors and defenders of their rights.”<sup>101</sup> Here we are reminded that workers are the strongest force in creating change. Their voices are the ones that will ultimately have the greatest impact when talking to managers, government and the public about their struggles.

Humanitarians are aware that workers are the strongest voices to respond and stand up for their rights. We know that workers have to be able to create their own platform and have a voice so they can be empowered and have the freedom to vocalize their concerns. This will not happen

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<sup>101</sup> Ross, Robert J.S. *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004.

if humanitarians and their organizations are quick to respond but do not listen. The point of this thesis is to help organizations to see how their missions can shadow the women they propose to represent. It is not to say that they do not have the best interest of the women in mind or that they want to put them in a subordinate position, however, the way they present and display women only creates a bias, and an impenitence for the audience to get involved in what the organizations are presenting.

This thesis is aware of how that it can be challenging it can be when doing human rights work. It is not easy to represent a group of people and try to create change. It is challenging to present the goals of the organization without dominating the representation of the issues that affect women workers. It also can be challenging to present information without becoming selective of what should be reported or posted without framing it.

This thesis exposes the power that lies with organizations. It shows there is a lack of collaboration between the women and organizations. Even though there are pictures or interviews, it does not mean there is a thorough presentation and representation of women. It reveals that framing eclipses the women's full voice and, organizations have more control on what issues and topics get discussed. Congresswoman Jackie Speier stated, "The least we can do is support these women when they speak out against violence and dire workplace conditions."<sup>102</sup> This statement shows how important it is as an outsider one of the main things is to support these women. This reminds us that women are strong and capable of standing up for themselves and presenting what they want instead of organizations overshadowing and creating their own frame. If organizations can collaborate with the women and support them--as they are the leaders and

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<sup>102</sup> "Resolution to Protect Women in Global Supply Chains." *International Labor Rights Forum* (April 16, 2016). <http://www.laborrights.org/releases/resolution-protect-women-global-supply-chains>.

forerunners in leading the discussion in the industry-- there could potentially be more progress made in the industry.

### **5.3: Closing Remarks**

Having examined human rights organizations closely, and the work they do to represent women, I have shown the successes of their work, how they frame issues and the limitations of their framing. I argued that human rights organizations do represent women, however, their framing of women's narratives puts limitations on their voices. I have analyzed human rights organizations, arguing that even with displays of women workers in images and their narratives on the sites, there is a lack of openness for women to have more control on what is presented to the public. There essentially is a filter on their voices that work in favor for the mission of the organization instead of the women. I have reviewed literature where "experts" determined the information and the solutions that they saw to be fit for improving the garment industry. However, in the literature they all were quick to respond without mentioning how women garment workers contribute to the solutions. I asserted that there was poor representation shown in the literature and a lack of acknowledgement for women, which does not fully open the door for women be involved.

What this thesis demonstrates is that framing is a prime reason why it is difficult to represent these women workers. Organizations need to be more aware of the way they utilize women's voices, because it limits women's own ideas and voices from being heard. For those interested in representation and what advocacy should look like, we should not only ask are women being represented, but we should also engage in how organizations pick and choose certain subjects and stories to highlight and to draw the audience's attention. There needs to be a focus on where women garment workers add to the conversation and exposure to see the amount



of women who are actually leading the cause. We need to challenge the current debates out there so that scholarly voices do not drown out the women. It is essential to know how to advocate for people without limiting their voices from being heard to create a cultural change. There needs to be a more collaborative effort between organizations and the women. If that relationship was there, there would be more room for women to decide what gets revealed, and allow them to be the leaders in the industry instead of organizations solely focusing on their own missions.

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