

Drew University

College of Liberal Arts

On the Sociological Dynamics of Scandal and Their Consequences:  
The Case of Zara Brasil, 2011

A Thesis in Sociology

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Bachelor in Arts

With Specialized Honors in Sociology

May 2019

## Abstract

In this case study, I examine the 2011 scandal involving the fashion-retailer Zara when the company was found exploiting workers under slavery-like conditions in three different sweatshops in São Paulo, Brazil. Looking at the different scandal actors and their roles and three scandal-related processes (convergence of discontent into a single target, publicization of norm-breach, and contagion of discontent to other organizations and areas of social life) helps understand the potentials for social change enabled by corporate scandals as well as the institutional stagnation which unfortunately often occur in their wake (Daudigeos, Roulet, and Valiorgue 2018). The Zara scandal resulted in the signing of a Conduct Adjustment Agreement between Zara lawyers and Brazilian labor prosecutors (which outlined the new labor auditing and transparency guidelines and social services/philanthropic activities which Zara Brasil was to undertake) and the creation of a Slave Labor Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (PIC) within the state of São Paulo. In sum, the full force of the Brazilian anti-slavery apparatus was seen at work here as the scandal news shocked the public, but these consequences had little-to-no net effect on the robustness of the judicial, political, and economic systems which protect global trade and multinational corporations from nation-states' sanctioning power. The scandal-related processes, especially the contagion of public discontent from one economic sector (fashion-retailing) to another (construction) through the Slave Labor PIC, offered promising results in the realm of social change, but, again, nothing as concrete that it forced the company to cease disrespecting labor rights.

**Keywords:** scandal, Zara, Inditex, global supply chains, multinational corporations, corporate social responsibility, labor reform, contemporary slavery, human trafficking.

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## On the Sociological Dynamics of Scandal and Their Consequences: The Case of Zara Brasil, 2011

### INTRODUCTION

From Bill Clinton's extramarital escapades (York 1998), to the disregard for laborers' human rights in the 2022 World Cup construction sites in Qatar (Amnesty International 2016), to the horrific loss of life in the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh (ILO 2019), internationally-appraised *scandals* are recurrent to say the least. These controversies can notably have disparate causes, ranging from a politician's cheating habits to the manslaughter of 1,132 workers in Rana Plaza. And perhaps historically scandals have more often been about individuals, but organizations, firms, groups, and entire economic sectors seem to be implicated with increasing frequency in public controversies as modernity advances (see de Blic and Lemieux 2005; Molotch and Lester 1974)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, in this context, scandals are arguably instrumental in disseminating concerns otherwise limited to groups much smaller than the general public such as when corporate scandals cast the worries of many critical observers regarding the lack of health, safety, and fairness of pay in global supply chains (GSCs).

At least 16 million people are *forced to labor* in the private sector around the world today (ILO 2017) - although some argue this figure is much higher (Kessler 2015; Weitzer 2015; Zanin 2017). And with many of them in jobs outsourced from developed to developing nations as a means of avoiding labor regulations (Fouladvand 2018; ITUC 2016), scandals have become

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., the #MeToo movement with men in positions of power in general and the entertainment industry in particular (MacKinnon 2019). Of course, the #MeToo movement successfully harnessed the reach of social media combined with the impact scandals can offer to actors or stakeholders. That is, as we will see, scandals are very much political activities (Markovits and Silverstein 1988); different sides have different interests and act upon these interests hence strategy is key (Jacobsson and Löfmarck 2008). Studies such as the present one could, in fact, inform the development of new policy by uncovering avenues for collective action. See the Conclusion chapter for suggestions.

especially problematic for large multinational corporations (MNCs). Indeed, “[h]igh-profile labour-rights scandals continue to draw attention to a range of exploitative conditions found in supply chains, with increasing consideration being given to the concept of modern slavery and its presence in the supply chains of some well-known companies” (Nolan and Bott 2018:1; see also ITUC 2016), such as the famed fashion-retailer Zara which in 2011 was found using forced labor within their supply chain in Brazil (Campos, van Huijstee, and Theuws 2015). In the manufacturing facilities producing apparel for Zara, with a set-up evocative of late 19<sup>th</sup> century sweatshops with its unsanitary and dangerous spaces with exposed electrical wiring, workdays lasted 16 hours and even unschooled teenagers labored as seamstresses (Campos et al. 2015).<sup>2</sup> In this way, the Zara scandal (ZS) is arguably an emblematic example of how “global business is in such bad shape,” as the International Trade Union Confederation asserts (ITUC 2016:3).

To briefly summarize the ZS, on August 16, 2011, the Brazilian TV news channel Rede Bandeirantes aired the investigative-journalism show *A Liga*. In a one-hour-and-fifteen-minute-long segment, they denounced several locations in Brazil wherein the journalists, accompanying federal policepeople and labor auditors, uncovered what they called *labor conditions analogous to slavery* (Pichetto 2011).<sup>3</sup> Between the urban and rural settings of these instances of slave-like labor, one of the raids stood out: two sweatshops working for Zara Brasil were discovered in the financial heart of the country, the city of São Paulo. Quickly gaining national and international

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<sup>2</sup> Historically, perhaps the most famous case of apathy towards workers’ needs is the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City wherein 146 mostly-female women of ethnic minorities were killed. This man-made disaster led to many legislative changes in New York and the United States and helped popularize the term ‘sweatshop’ as descriptive of highly unsafe and unsanitary manufacturing workplaces (Greenwald 2005).

<sup>3</sup> The August 16 date marked the end of police and labor investigations which had begun two months prior in early May (Pyl and Hashizume 2011b). The entire episode of this program called *A Liga* can still be watched on vimeo.com (Pichetto 2011). As quoted by a journalist working for Repórter Brasil (Hashizume 2011a), one of the lead labor auditors in the investigation explained: “From the raid in Americana (SP) that occurred in May [2011], we proceeded with investigations and inspections that ended up proving that the situation was not isolated.” (Author’s translation from the original: “A partir do flagrante em Americana (SP) ocorrido em maio [de 2011], prosseguimos com investigações e fiscalizações que acabaram comprovando que aquela situação não era isolada.”)

attention due to the high-profile brand implicated (Moreira, Ferraço, and Santos 2017; Salomão 2011), said piece of the TV segment, released simultaneously with an article by the NGO Repórter Brasil (Pyl and Hashizume 2011b) who was also involved in the investigation, triggered the ZS. Soon after, Zara Brasil's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), at the time Enrique Huerta Gonzalez, and the two Zara business partners who served as intermediaries between the MNC and the manufacturers were invited to attend a meeting of the State of São Paulo's Legislative Assembly's Commission for the Defense of Human Rights, Citizenship, Participation and Social Affairs (ALESP in the original).<sup>4</sup> Claiming busyness, the businessmen did not attend the meeting which took place on 31 August, only fifteen days after the official moment of scandalization (i.e., the mediatic denunciation by A Liga and Repórter Brasil) (Pyl and Hashizume 2011c). This was not the last they would hear from the Commission, however.

A month later, and after the formal invitation of the Brazilian National Congress, Inditex's (Zara's European parent company) Global Director of Communications, at the time Jesus Echevarria, and Gonzalez, Zara Brasil's CEO, faced some questions posed by federal congresspeople and also apologized publicly, but nonetheless *claimed plausible deniability*, essentially revoking their direct responsibility over the dozens of labor infractions found in the sweatshops (Hashizume 2011a). Inditex's official, that is, was that when they outsourced those manufacturing jobs, they were not made aware that the partners to whom they had outsourced were, in turn, going to outsource those jobs to yet another company as well. In other words, the sweatshop facilities were producing un-officially in an unauthorized manner since the clothing company was not aware, as claimed by Echevarria and Gonzalez (Hashizume 2011b). Similarly apologetic statements were given when the same businessmen went to the ALESP's Human

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<sup>4</sup> Comissão de Defesa dos Direitos da Pessoa Humana, da Cidadania, da Participação e das Questões Sociais da Assembleia Legislativa do Estado de São Paulo (ALESP)

Rights Commission later in September. However, this argument was put to severe doubt by the labor prosecutors on the case since, among other unexplained connections, the sweatshops were in direct communication with Zara Brasil and the Inditex headquarters received specialized manufacturing instructions from and sent samples for quality-checking to the Spanish company (Hashizume 2011a; Pyl and Hashizume 2011c).<sup>5</sup> Finally, after a contested negotiation process, Zara signed a conduct adjustment agreement (CAA – similar to the United States’ Deferred Prosecution Agreements for white collar crime) promulgated by the Regional Superintendence of Labor and Employment of the State of São Paulo (SRTE-SP hereinafter)<sup>6</sup>, serving under the Brazilian Ministry of Labor, on 19 December 2011 (Pyl and Hashizume 2011d).

In the years that followed, Zara came to be targeted again by the media and the Brazilian government for failure to comply with the CAA of December 2011 on more than one occasion. This resulted in fines and a subpoena by the 2014 Parliamentary Inquiry Commission wherein Zara Brasil’s representatives admitted the company’s irresponsible disregard for what happened in their GSC (Ojeda 2014). As some of the scandal participants declared, perhaps most notably from the labor prosecution governmental office behind the investigations which lead to the ZS, the scandal was educational to the retailer sector and beyond (Campos et al. 2015; Pyl and Hashizume 2011b); but was it? And how so?

To begin understanding how the scandal played out and what were the consequences of such dynamic interplay of its participants and their actions, this thesis’s objective is to gaze at the story above with a sociological lens. More specifically, two questions guide the analysis: (1) To what extent were fringe or peripheral actors (i.e., those without direct decision-making power)

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<sup>5</sup> Another suspicious connection was that at least one of the three sweatshops raided by the police and labor auditors had been supposedly visited by the private auditors hired by Zara, but had not received another visit or been red-flagged for its very visible infractions (Hashizume 2011b).

<sup>6</sup> *Superintendência Regional do Trabalho e Emprego de São Paulo.*

able to both participate in the scandal activities and exert their influence, and (2) With what degree of confidence can one infer social change as a decisive and direct consequence of the scandal?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Scandology*

Zooming out of the Zara case, then, and returning to the broader notion of scandal, even casual observers might agree that scandals, instances of “collective effervescence,” as Durkheim (1995; see also Markovits and Silverstein 1988) would put it, must have some importance in our contemporary society. I provide in this section a review of scandology (the study of scandal) mainly through a sociological perspective and, in the following section, some of the relevant literature pertaining to corporations’ labor rights abuses.

The study of scandal as an analytical construct in its own right (opposed to a unitary event within a larger history) has gathered increasing attention over the past few decades across the fields of sociology (de Blic and Lemieux 2005; Jacobsson and Löfmarck 2008; Sass and Crosbie 2013), media studies (Kantola and Vesa 2013; Molotch and Lester 1974), business studies (Daudigeos, Roulet, and Valiorgue 2018; Hamilton 2015), political science (Markovits and Silverstein 1988), and social psychology (Jiang et al. 2011) just to name a few. However, given the plurality of views or interdisciplinary foci, these perspectives overlap greatly when it comes down to effectively analyzing specific cases of scandal. In other examples, furthermore, although some scholars elect to emphasize the concept of scandal as their object of analysis, others approach very similar concepts from other angles such as Alexander (2018) and Bail

(2015) in their respective models of leaks of classified information and their resulting effects. To start, then, begs the question: what is a scandal?

Originally a religious term (e.g., think also of ‘disgrace’), scandal has evolved as a term over time and across situations (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:VI footnote 13). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*’s (2019) definition for scandal is: “discredit brought upon religion by unseemly conduct in a religious person.” (See de Blic and Lemieux 2005:VI, footnote 13 for other uses of the term.) For the purposes of this thesis, the concept of *scandal* is more analytically useful if defined as “*a test of transgressed values* that allows the community concerned to determine whether or not it has become indifferent to these values” (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:iv, italics added for emphasis)<sup>7</sup>. A scandal, therefore, begins when a norm-transgression is *publicized*, not when a norm is transgressed (Daudigeos et al. 2018). Deviant behavior, in other words, is only truly scandalous when there is a public who openly condemns that specific deviation.

The definition offered above also suggests that the scandal is a social activity with actors who engage in scandal-related activities with the intent of testing the public’s attachment to a certain norm. The actions undertaken within the context of any scandal, then, can be classified in terms of whether they uphold the given norm or, in turn, contest it (de Blic and Lemieux 2005). Echoing dramaturgical (role) theory (Goffman 1955/2015; Ritzer and Stepnisky 2018:62–63), this view gives us the roles of norm testers versus norm justifiers – the two general sides of a scandal. These can be further paired with the parallel roles of accused (i.e., norm testers) versus accusers (i.e., norm justifiers); one can thereby see that the original norm-breach may be seen as the first norm contestation of the scandal activities whereas the publicization of the

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<sup>7</sup> The word ‘test’ is used here and by de Blic and Lemieux in direct translation of the French ‘épreuve.’ Notwithstanding, “[i]n the Francophone world, [...] the term *épreuve* has a more complex meaning, referring also to ‘trial’, ‘ordeal’, and ‘proof’.” (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:IV) This should help clarify the polysemy of this concept as it is herein sociologically applied.

norm-breach can be seen as the first norm justification – which sets the relatively patterned chain of defiant/justificatory actions seen going back and forth between both sides. In other words, an accusation of deviance can be seen as a speech-act, or the act of making a deviant behavior public thereby jumpstarting the scandal (see de Blic and Lemieux 2005).

On a different note, scholars have attempted to emphasize the normality of scandals, i.e., how they should be seen as a recurrent phenomenon that is functional for society since they serve as means to an end – the end being the institutionalization of a new norm or the re-institutionalization (i.e., affirmation) of an old one who withstood contestation (Sass and Crosbie 2013). This functionalist perspective, however, with its focus on norm maintenance, might overlook another closely-related subject which is the change in systems of norms following the conclusion of a scandal. That is because scandals are essentially public, collective, and often poignant competitions between a side that defends a norm and a side that contests it, “something” will inevitably have changed in their aftermath (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:iv). That is, the people involved in the scandal channel outrage and try to articulate the morality behind the deviant acts or the unfair treatment they might be facing in light of these acts. There is a period of anomie, to use a more Durkheimian terminology, through which norms and alternative to these norms are all cast, considered, and debated – some are notably more quickly discarded than others, of course, something which is also part of the scandal processes. The unknowingness of what is going to happen further demonstrates how scandals can be seen as a crisis or collectively-shared moments of uncertainty.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The word ‘uncertainty’ is conceptually at the center of this approach. “Conceiving of scandal as an *épreuve* (test) affirms above all the *uncertainty* weighing on its outcome, an uncertainty that tends to erase etiological approaches such as those that, placing themselves at the end of the story, enjoy making it linear” (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:iv–v italics added for emphasis). This notion of uncertainty, whereas arguably detrimental to the sociological pursuit of concrete (definite, ‘very certain’) patterns, is not just meant to be aimed at the researcher: the actors themselves are uncertain of what can happen during a scandal and hence act accordingly (i.e., by strategizing, planning,

Concurrently, then, one can see here an attempt to approach the scandal free from righteous pretenses:

the pragmatist approach [to scandal], which recognizes that the scandal is a test or a trial *belonging first to the actors*[,] may have a scientific value that is superior to the objectivism claimed by the sworn enemies of illusions (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:xxvi italics added for emphasis).

In other words, the researcher can look beyond the moral implications of the scandal and begin searching for the patterns through which these moral implications are collectively articulated by the actors.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, when one refers to individuals/organizations involved in scandals as *actors*, dramaturgy or role theory should be kept in mind because where there is an actor there is also a role to play with a script or procedure to follow (Goffman 1955). In this way, the norm justifications and contestations inadvertently happen within the context of pre-established procedures or rituals, at least at first, that is appropriate to the actors involved. This is important because it shapes expectations for what each one should or should not be doing. In the ZS, the actors are Zara/Inditex, an MNC, the Brazilian federal and the São Paulo state governments, the media, and NGOs such as Repórter Brasil. Their scripts were the Brazilian labor laws, international norms regarding contemporary slavery, and the corporate social responsibility procedures that Zara/Inditex, as an MNC, already had in their institutional framework.

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improvising, and also losing/winning legitimacy and public attention as they play their parts to the best of their abilities). On a more phenomenological level, then, or as a means of ontologically embedding the analysis in an ultimately phenomenological reality, “[the pragmatist] approach also provides the means of restoring the state of anxiety, uncertainty, and unreality into which scandal, like all fluid conjecture more generally, tends to plunge those who are implicated.” (de Blic and Lemieux 2005:v)

<sup>9</sup> “Too often,” de Blic and Lemieux (2005:xxvii) regret, “sociology remains at the stage of the scandal in the relationship it entertains with scandalous subjects, with the researcher becoming indignant about what some of the actors under study do or say. That is,” the authors complete, “he wants to show them that they are wrong to be scandalized, or conversely, wrong not to be.”

*Corporate Social Responsibility as the Corporate Scandal Script*

Two important concepts to highlight at this point are global supply chains and corporate social responsibility since they set the parameters for much of the interactional dynamics of the ZS. *Global supply chains* (GSC) are the international trade networks of production and distribution of goods and services through which corporations can outsource their activities to other (often smaller and less powerful) businesses for cheaper costs of production (ITUC 2016; Nolan and Bott 2018). *Corporate social responsibility* (CSR) arose as a principle to guide corporative compliance with human rights through the explicit commitment to accountability and transparency (Alessio 2004).<sup>10</sup> In other words, CSR can be seen as the acknowledgment that GSCs and business environments in general may be problematic when it comes to labor relations and the impact they effect in society because they tend to diffuse responsibility and accountability across countless layers of bureaucracy. CSR is a code of ethics, an ethical framework for how to do business but is not a formal law of any kind – especially in international law and in the Brazilian constitution. Furthermore, authors have demonstrated how exploitation is known but usually not publicly addressed (or solved) thanks to CSR intra-organizational management mechanisms and legal instruments (Barrientos and Smith 2007; Daudigeos et al. 2018; Fouladvand 2018; Nolan and Bott 2018; The Editorial Board 2013; Veiga and Galhera 2017). When corporate scandals implicating GSCs cast relevant norms for discussion, CSR functions as script, a structure of action across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels

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<sup>10</sup> This accountability plays out mainly in the form of disclosure or transparency agreements (Brown 2017; Nolan and Bott 2018). Inditex's CEO Pablo Isla, driven by CSR ethics, wrote in the company's most recent public annual report: "We put our people and the people who work in our supply chain at the heart of all our decisions, which is why we closely work with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and participate actively in the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and the Ethical Trading Initiative." (Inditex 2018a:7) The thesis explores said relationship with more depth in Chapter 5. As such, the company has published an annual report online yearly for over a decade wherein they outline production and sales numbers as well as give some information bout their encounters with justice systems in different countries.

of interaction, which can be used by the actors as agents, yes, but also as components of larger political-economic trends (e.g., the installment of unregulated GSCs through economic globalization).

This is a time of mobile companies and immobile governments. Businesses relocate wherever labor is cheapest or taxes lowest; companies like Inditex chose to manufacture in countries with less restrictive labor laws than those in other countries (Barrientos and Smith 2007; Brown 2017; ITUC 2016). Meanwhile, states want jobs for the populace and positive gross domestic products every year; hence, the ability of companies to provide jobs and tax revenue factors into their ability to mitigate or even completely avoid formal sanctions from governments:

Some business practices within these [GSCs] have eroded respect for, or simply disregarded, human rights, and such practices have most acutely impacted precarious workers, including informal, migrant, contract, and female workers in global supply chains. (Nolan and Bott 2018:2)

CSR is supposed to address these issues by institutionalizing labor audits and transparency reports, but these are notably largely voluntary initiatives and often fail to provide specific information about companies' own operations (Brown 2017; Nolan and Bott 2018). Rather than direct state interventions, the main sanction these measures provide is through consumer activism in that naming and shaming companies may instill boycotts or praising them may incentivize socially-geared competition and socially-conscious consumers.

In addition, businesses typically make their CSR procedures usually in partnership with CSR norms-bodies such as international organizations (e.g, the ILO). There is no single international body, however, that can oversee labor relations and punish deviance from CSR norms. Compliance with CSR, then, is widely unenforceable since states can only impose laws within their territories thereby configuring CSR as an essentially voluntary practice (Nolan and

Bott 2018). This makes corporate scandals difficult to yield reform-type change since MNCs can, besides bribing politicians to avoid trouble, simply move to a new country if they encounter obstacles to the implementation of their operations (Brown 2017; Jammulamadaka and Saha 2017). Some developing countries, therefore, may be discouraged from attacking MNCs out of fear of losing the economic benefits of hosting their branches in their national markets (ITUC 2016; Lipset 1994; Nolan and Bott 2018). Brazil, however, displayed somewhat of a different stance in many of its actions during the ZS, as will be seen: congresspeople thoroughly attacked Zara/Inditex with what was arguably the full force of the relevant Brazilian legal apparatus. At other times, however, submission to the MNC could arguably have been observed and speculated upon (e.g., when prosecutors and Zara's lawyers met to negotiate the CAA in attempt to re-define Zara's social responsibilities vis-à-vis the Brazilian population).

#### *Corporate social responsibility and labor law in Brazil*

To be clear, CSR is not a law in Brazil – it is, in fact, hardly a law anywhere, with a few possible exceptions such as India (Balch 2016). Instead, the “social function” of private property is the juridical concept alluded to by the Brazilian constitution (Costa and Borin 2018). Specific cases when agreements between government and enterprise establish a labor-rights compliance mechanism do exist (as, e.g., what happened between Zara Brasil and the Brazilian government through the aforementioned CAA), but scholars have evaluated these and other (largely voluntary and ‘toothless’) initiatives to be lacking in that the state becomes a mild regulator and parameter-setter rather than executioner of rules and punisher of non-compliance (Costa and Borin 2018; Nolan and Bott 2018). CSR outlines weak norm with little legal weight.

Nolan and Bott (2018:7, 9) explain that there are currently only two ways of regulating GSCs: (a) voluntary guidelines in multi-stakeholder initiatives (e.g., the UN Human Rights Council's 2011 Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – textbook CSR – and the Brazilian National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labor), and (b) domestic legislation targeting “modern slavery practices” in supply chains (e.g., the 2015 United Kingdom Modern Slavery Act and the 2010 California Transparency in Supply Chains Act). Item (a) indicates that regulating GSCs requires the involvement of transnational organizations, whereas item (b) refers to the use of laws whose jurisdiction are limited to state territories. Notably, Brazil's polity has become well-regarded in the international antislavery community (Campos et al. 2015; Douglas 2016).

The Brazilian anti-contemporary slavery apparatus pertaining to businesses and human rights violations may be summarized in two parts: (a) legislation (e.g., norms codified into law) and (b) government-civil society joint initiatives. Beyond prohibiting people under the age of 16 from working for pay (with the exception of some manual-labor apprenticeships for 15 year-olds), both the Brazilian Federal Constitution and the Penal Code criminalize

work in degrading conditions and exhaustive workdays [...] under the concept of ‘work analogous to slavery,’ even when there is no evidence of restriction of freedom [of mobility]. ‘Degrading conditions’ are usually characterised by a combination of the following factors: precarious lodging; susceptibility to illness; poor sanitation conditions; insufficient and inadequate nutrition; inadequate compensation and unpaid wages and; abuse and violence” (Campos et al. 2015:26).

Fines, community or social services (e.g., philanthropy), and, to a lesser frequency and extent, prison time from two to eight years are generally the punishments for the crimes of contemporary slavery. The CAA is part of this legal context in the sense that it is a measure or power given to the Public Ministry (a Brazilian federal institution responsible for defending the

individual and collective rights of citizens in court) by the Federal Constitution through which social responsibility (CSR in the case of companies) is explicitly defined and thereafter expected to be respected under the threat of more fines.

Concurrently, there are also initiatives which complement legislation. More specifically, (1) mobile units of labor inspections working under the federal ministry of labor (like the one that raided the sweatshops in the Zara case), (2) prosecution offices specialized in defending survivors of contemporary slavery and securing monetary compensation (usually calculated in terms of stolen wages), (3) the “Dirty List,” and (4) the Brazilian National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labor (Campos et al. 2015).

The Dirty List and the Brazilian National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labor (i.e., the Pact) have become international standards as mechanisms for contemporary slavery prevention (Campos et al. 2015; Kelly 2013). The latter, a pact which businesses can sign, abide by its guidelines, and enjoy a good-standing reputation and receive antislavery training from NGOs and labor inspection offices; the former is a list released and updated often multiple times per year containing names of businesses who were raided and fined for CS practices. Dirty listed enterprises may stay on the list for two years if no other infractions are discovered by the authorities (Douglas 2016). This is CSR for a globalizing world: these mechanisms are based on reputation and naming-and-shaming – arguably the best form of anti-contemporary slavery governance currently available (Nolan and Bott 2018).<sup>11</sup>

### *Research Questions and Hypotheses*

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<sup>11</sup> The Pact is a ‘white’ list of which businesses respect labor law whereas the Dirty List is a ‘black’ list of those who do not.

In light of the literature review above, which enumerated (1) how scandals have been conceptualized by scholars as tests of for collectively shared norms and (2) the ways that contemporary slavery is conceptualized as a collection of labor infractions in the Brazilian polity and its relationship with CSR principles, this section will integrate these disparate elements of the ZS and propose a few research questions to ground the forthcoming analysis. It therefore is important to reiterate that the goal for this thesis is to understand the level of fringe actors' involvement in the ZS activities and whether the resolution for the scandal yielded significant social change.

To give more context, there are arguably two views on the ZS: one - generally supported by the labor auditors, prosecutors, and Repórter Brasil - was that the ZS set some sound legal precedence for the future resolution of corporate scandals of contemporary slavery (see Campos et al. 2015). The other view, seen in Veiga and Galhera (2017), is that the lack of direct worker-involvement in the scandal activities can be taken as a clear sign that the decision-making processes were all lead by top-down entities (i.e., Inditex and the Brazilian government) who were disconnected from the harsh realities which funnel (poor, immigrant) workers into those positions of contemporary slavery. That is, following the raids of the sweatshops which lead to the publicization of the scandal, the workers were all paid a part of the wages they were owed by the intermediaries (but not Inditex itself) and sent in a few different ways to move on with their lives in other locations and places of work with the help of NGOs and unions, but were not included in any scandal-related negotiation whatsoever. Veiga and Galhera (2017), again, see this as a sign that the reforms coming out of CSR procedures are more cosmetic than structurally or systemically impactful.

Therefore, what is significant change? In this essay, the notion of *contagion* is considered to be an important aspect of change or social reform since it implies that the scandal spread to other areas of social life outside of the immediate actors involved. This will be the focus when it comes to the concept of social change because although the issues of unsafe labor migration, poverty, racism, and gender discrimination (i.e., some of the underlying factors causing the victimization of the rescued workers) were not addressed by the scandal resolution, the consequences of the ZS still reverberated across other Brazilian industries and areas of the anti-contemporary slavery apparatus. In this way, the question of fringe actors' involvement and degree of change can be answered as follows: The ZS, through the processes of convergence, publicization, and contagion, facilitated the participation of Repórter Brasil in the labor investigations and the prosecution of Zara, and, concurrently, allowed for the expansion of discontent from one company (Zara) to a broader critical view of the textile industry and, later, to other industries (e.g., construction) thanks to the institutionalization of the Slave Labor CPI, the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee installed in response to the ZS.

## DATA AND METHODS

The sources of data for this study consist mainly of published articles by the NGO Repórter Brasil covering the developments of the ZS and the report they published in a partnership with SOMO, an Amsterdam-based international NGO. Official governmental and

Inditex documents are also utilized here. All of the information here is available to the public and can be found online.

The methodological approach to the data selection, organization, and analysis of this study is what is known as the case study method (Hammersley 2004; Stark and Torrance 2005). This approach “seeks to engage with and report the complexity of social activity in order to represent the meanings that individual social actors bring to those settings [of social activity] and manufacture in them” (Stark and Torrance 2005:33). It has advantages and disadvantages like any other scientific approach to data collection, selection, and analysis.<sup>12</sup>

Case studies such as the present one provide support for concepts about the inner-workings, the interactions, processes, i.e., they provide answers to ‘how’ questions. Further, they articulate multiple factors which would be difficult to understand quantitatively due to their overlapping nature and simultaneity. With regards to its most notorious methodological disadvantage, researchers are more than justified in their weariness when it comes to case studies’ *lack of generalizability* (Hammersley 2004; Stark and Torrance 2005). That is why follow-up studies with more comparative methods, drawing from several cases at once can further add value to the study of processes. Nonetheless, this is a useful and valid method for examining and analyzing a specific case or instance and can yield insights that other methods may not. This is especially true since I am applying Daudigeos et al.’s (2018) conceptual model – one which they have already theorized in relation to other similar corporate scandals. Furthermore, a case study method lends itself perfectly to this exercise in that it allows the researcher to examine in detail the inner-workings of the scandal, i.e., the dynamic interplay of

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, any science can be seen as either an enormous case study or a countless series of interrelated case studies. “Other things being equal, the less cases studied, the more information can be collected about each of them.” (Hammersley 2004:92) In other words, patterns and outcomes of specific instances can naturally only be better understood with the in-depth and holistic information provided by case studies.

actors and the interests driving them. In a way, the three main processes of convergence, publicization, and contagion describe the aggregate consequences of said inner-workings.

Why the Zara case, however? First, Zara has become a pioneer in outsourcing strategies and a famous name in global business. Second, the detailed coverage of ZS by Repórter Brasil provides a useful and rigorous description of the events surrounding the scandal. Third, this thesis can help expand social-scientific attention to this Brazilian event from its national context to a more international and English-speaking audience.

As Inditex's (a Spain-based retail production-and-distribution group) main subsidiary, Zara is currently the 46<sup>th</sup> most profitable brand in the world (Forbes 2018).<sup>13</sup> This places as an integral component of a relatively small network of companies which, advocates assert (ITUC 2016; see also footnote 15), could effectively change global trade since they are the ones governing the GSCs. Furthermore, as a pioneer in the increasingly-popular retailing model termed *fast fashion*, "Zara is renowned for its ability to develop a new product and get it to stores within two weeks, while other retailers take six months" (Forbes 2018).<sup>14</sup> Fast fashion is a consumer-driven retailing strategy whose defining characteristics are (a) low-cost, (b) low-quality, (c) fast response to changing markets, and, most importantly, (d) swift production of goods (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010; Ghemawat and Nueno 2006). Other multinational retailers (e.g., The Gap and H&M) have followed a similar production tactic in light of fast-fashion's profitable success (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010; Ghemawat and Nueno 2006; Perry 2018).

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<sup>13</sup> The other brands administered by this fashion group are Pull&Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home, and Uterqüe (Inditex 2018a:17–23). According to Forbes (2019), Inditex's founder Amancio Ortega, someone who "earns more than \$400 million in dividends a year," is the "the wealthiest retailer in the world." In 2017, Ortega made headlines upon becoming the world's richest man for a day – only to then be ousted by Bill Gates who swiftly reclaimed his title (Vinton 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Fast fashion is part of a large trend in the consumerist culture of instant gratification (for reviews, see Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010; Ghemawat and Nueno 2006; Roussenq and Lins 2018). As a sales strategy, it is widely criticized by neomaxist/anti-neoliberalist authors since it readily challenges workers' rights with its fast-paced, low-cost (i.e., underpaid) nature (Moreira et al. 2017; Roussenq and Lins 2018; Veiga and Galhera 2017).

In this way, Zara has been a protagonist in the trend of labor abuses by MNCs. It has largely contributed to the rise of scrutiny faced by supply chains thanks to the company's several supply chain-related scandals involving contemporary slavery (ITUC 2016; Ojeda 2014; Repórter Brasil 2011; Veiga and Galhera 2017) and/or environmental disregard (Consuelo 2017; Hoskins 2017; Perry 2018; The Economist 2017). Such protagonism has therefore two sides in that (1) Zara has brought suffering through its practices, but, in the wake of public scrutiny, it has also (2) relatively changed some of its business stances and set some laudable precedents (Inditex 2018a; Pyl and Hashizume 2011b).<sup>15</sup>

### *Zara Brasil and Its Host Country*

As mentioned, Zara is an Inditex's subsidiary (a business part of an even larger business). Inditex was founded in 1963 and quickly grew, eventually setting up shop in Brazil in November 1999 (Inditex 2018b). Zara Brasil is the store's Brazilian administrative branch with a CEO of its own. They did not go there by accident, of course, but out of corporate strategy: the retailer philosophy of outsourcing, and, more crudely, profit, drove the company to make the decisions they did concerning expansion; in this case, to expand to the Brazilian market.

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<sup>15</sup> Inditex, Zara's parent company, is one of the top multinational corporations with the "resources and the reach" (ITUC 2016:3) to enact significant change in the global supply chains, which entails that it deserves on-going critical assessment from academic, political, and consumer publics. As Veiga and Galhera (2017:150 footnote 16) put it in their own analysis of the ZS: "[t]he choice of the clothing sector is justified by the extension of social and labor problems intrinsic to the organization of the [supply] chain, historically, having in Shirtwaist Factory perhaps one of its first emblematic registrations [cases]. Inditex [...] is important for its size: it is one of the largest global clothing companies and the one which lead to the ultimate consequences of the corporate strategy of fast fashion." (Author's translation from the original: "A escolha do setor de vestuário justifica-se pela extensão dos problemas sociais e trabalhistas intrínsecos à organização da cadeia, historicamente, tendo em Shirtwaist Factory talvez um dos primeiros registros emblemáticos. A Inditex, holding que controla a Zara, é importante pelo seu tamanho: é uma das maiores empresas globais de vestuário e a que levou às últimas consequências a estratégia corporativa do fast fashion.")

In this entire ordeal, then, is Brazil ‘just’ a generic third-world country with opportunities for unregulated, low-cost production (therein incentivizing large multinationals to open stores and hire manufacturers in its territory)? As with many complex topics, the answer would be yes in many ways, but also no in some others. For one, postcolonialism as the theoretical underpinning to this brief discussion should inform us that there is a power asymmetry between an European multinational, avatar of neoliberal forces of a global economy, and a developing country in Latin America (Bhambra 2019; Jammulamadaka and Murphy 2017; Jammulamadaka and Saha 2017). However, democratic regimes with a concrete hold over their territories (such as the one seen in Brazil to a certain extent) are, in fact, needed for transnational trade agreements which sustain GSCs.

This points again to a double-sided assessment since it suggests that Brazil has the traits of a strong democracy, but also that those forces of supply-and-demand imposed by the global marketplace have shaped postcolonial democracies rather than the other way around (Lipset 1994). Brazil has been a democracy since 1988 after a military dictatorship stepped down; hence, Zara’s entrance into the national economy in 1999 is very much part of the country’s redemocratization process. It might be better, then, to frame the Brazilian polity as it relates to the ZS in terms of a transitional political-economy: the same type which research shows is more suitable for abuses such as contemporary slavery and human trafficking (Heller et al. 2016; Jiang and LaFree 2017). Critics have, therefore, pointed to how global power differentials, global inequality, and so on, shape existing structures of (very limited) governance over human/labor rights abuses (Bhambra 2019; Fouladvand 2018; ITUC 2016; Nolan and Bott 2018). There is considerable tension here, then, since CSR as ideology hopes to circumvent these known issues stirred by postcolonial political-economic dynamics and, as seen in the Literature Review

section, the way businesses and the state have negotiated CSR practices in this specific Latin-American country have been promising but limited (Parente, Lucas, and Cordeiro 2017).<sup>16</sup>

The discussion above served as a means of contextualizing the data and the accused actor in the scandal, Inditex/Zara, within a global trend in textile and manufacturing businesses as well as the Brazilian national context. In the following section, I will examine the narrative of the ZS as it unfolded through the procedures and discourses made available by the realities discussed above in relation to the three processes outlined by Daudigeos et al. (2018) – convergence, publicization, and contagion – as a means of anchoring the analysis.

## RESULTS

### *Convergence*

The process of convergence describes the general targeting of a single scandal actor to be the focus of the accusations and, consequently, the face of the scandal (Daudigeos et al. 2018:14). In the ZS, there was seemingly not much doubt about whom to blame. The one-hour-long TV segment of the program *A Liga* (Pichetto 2011) that aired at prime-time on August 16, days after the third sweatshop bust, and Repórter Brasil's extended coverage of the story (for a full report, see Campos et al. 2015) *converged* the attention of both Brazilian and international publics to Zara and its serious labor abuses. Authors such as de Blic and Lemieux (2005) may refer to this as the act of scandalization, a “speech-act” through which the target and their wrongdoings are made clear and public. In other words, it was the media - in coordination with civil society - who (a) publicized the norm-transgression by specifying (b) what behavior

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<sup>16</sup> There has been a recent resurgence of business ethics debates in Brazil amidst of political scandals involving politicians and wealthy businesspeople in an overwhelmingly pervasive net of conspiracy (for a case study of the impact of the recent and on-going Brazilian anti-corruption operation Car Wash [*Lava Jato*], see Costa and Borin 2018).

(profiteering of contemporary slavery) was dissonant with the dominant/expected values (the antislavery law and adjacent cultural norm) and (c) *who* had done it (Zara/Inditex). Convergence certainly happened here in that Zara/Inditex was at the center stage of the congressional investigations and mediatized accusations, but one can trace the provenance of this process back to the pre-scandal phase when the investigators were still raiding sweatshops. One can therefore challenge Daudigeos et al.'s (2018) understanding of convergence with the ZS data and, in fact, arrive at an expanded version of the concept.

The authors write about convergence as an *effect* of the scandal (Daudigeos et al. 2018:14), but, by applying the multi-stage model of scandal previously referenced, convergence can arguably be observed here even prior to the moment of scandalization. It is not merely a matter of semantics: any behavior can be seen as value-free until someone measures it in relation to a norm or value. If one takes the qualitative differences between the different stages of scandal seriously, then it becomes clear that the scandal only begins when the public reacts to the norm-transgression and not before that (de Blic and Lemieux 2005). Convergence in the ZS case therefore began at the moment of identification of the norm-transgression, which may have been scandalous for the small group of investigators who detected it but it was not a full-blown scandal yet. As Pyl and Hashizume (2011b) explained in the Repórter Brasil piece that came out as a type of companion to the story on TV by Rede Bandeirantes, it was the first raid in Americana, SP, that made the labor auditors plan to go after other Zara manufacturers in order to build a larger legal case against the MNC. Involving civil society and the media was part of this plan because, for one, the labor auditors knew that Zara's internationally famous name could easily make the headlines. "Because it is a large brand [Zara], which is all over the world, the

action becomes exemplary and educational for the entire sector,”<sup>17</sup> as one of the auditors told the press (Pyl and Hashizume 2011b). Moreover, the scandalizers, i.e., the media, were tasked with carrying over the process of convergence into a single target already taking place from the closed circle of investigators to the public sphere.

To clarify, the investigations were first-and-foremost led by the FP and labor auditors while the scandalizers were invited by these legal authorities *precisely to scandalize*, i.e., to take the detected norm-transgression and show it to the public. Investigative journalists from Repórter Brasil and Rede Bandeirantes were among the inspectors in the July and August raids in São Paulo because the SRTE-SP (the state-organ that oversees labor inspections) invoked their partnership with Repórter Brasil. Established in the 2009 “Pact Against Precariousness and For Decent Employment and Work In Textile Production Chains,”<sup>18</sup> which was signed by the SRTE-SP, local businesses, and civil society entities (a few syndicates and NGOs), said partnership entailed that the civil society co-signers were to be included in labor inspections.<sup>19</sup>

Convergence can therefore be seen as not necessarily an effect of scandal but rather as part of the “drama of concealment and exposure” that weaves through all the scandal stages, thereby precluding scandalization as well as surpassing it, albeit transformed, after the first accusation is made, fingers are pointed, names are named, and so on (de Blic and Lemieux 2005). In short, the scandal does not cause convergence: instead, convergence causes the scandal and sustains it over time.

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<sup>17</sup> Author’s translation from the original: “Por se tratar de uma grande marca, que está no mundo todo, a ação se torna exemplar e educativa para todo o setor.”

<sup>18</sup> *Pacto Contra a Precarização e pelo Emprego e Trabalho Decentes – Cadeia Produtiva das Confeções*.

<sup>19</sup> The document also alludes to responsibilities for public organs and NGOs such as hosting public lectures to raise awareness about contemporary forms of slavery.

What is more, this continued influence of the convergence principle on the activities of the scandal facilitates the entrance of peripheral stakeholders (outsiders to the main political decision-making circle) such as unions and NGOs who have less decision-making power into formal conversations regarding the issue exactly as Daudigeos et al. (2018) have conceptualized it. To illustrate, let us consider two hypotheses Daudigeos and colleagues proposed in terms of the relationship between convergence and its consequences and then pair them with the ZS data. First, they argue that “[c]orporate scandals, via the process of convergence on a single target, make CEOs of targeted MNCs personally accountable for malfeasant practices and push them to reconsider their ideologies” (Daudigeos et al. 2018:14). This is close to the empirical reality of the ZS in that the CEO of Zara’s Brazilian branch was invited to SP’s state congress and, although he rejected the invitation the first time (Pyl and Hashizume 2011c), he went to the national congress to apologize two weeks later and, yet another two weeks after, finally met with SP’s state congress (Hashizume 2011a, 2011b). He was not alone; however, the global spokesperson for Inditex, Zara’s parent company, was also present in the meeting. When questioned whether Zara would change its model of operations, the Inditex representative answered no because it is the “fast-fashion philosophy” to outsource production (Hashizume 2011b). What is more, the businessmen’s personal ideology were explicitly questioned by Repórter Brasil in that, when asked, they answered that they would not buy clothes that had been made by laborers in slave-like conditions (Hashizume 2011b).

The theorists also suggest that “[a] scandal, through the process of convergence on a single target, creates a coalition of political allies that brings support and resources to fringe stakeholders against the targeted MNC.” (Daudigeos et al. 2018:15) As seen, Repórter Brasil, a pro-workers’ rights NGO and therefore a fringe stakeholder, was called along Rede Bandeirantes

to be a part of the scandal. The civil society-media coordination is a political alliance in itself as well as the public prosecutors' work with Repórter Brasil.

Now, there is a language of scandalization associated with the process of convergence; it matters *how* the communicators of information to the public articulate the evidence for their claims – which is not to state that the evidence needs to be valid and reliable in the way that scientists may talk about it (de Blic and Lemieux 2005; Gamson et al. 1992; Molotch and Lester 1974). The framing of the issue as an issue of “contemporary slavery” wherein the workers were in a situation “analogous to slavery” was explicitly enabled by the usage these very terms in the TV segment and other media pieces on the matter. In the next section, this notion will be articulated through what Daudigeos et al. (2018:16) term “the process of publicization of deviant practices.”

### *Publicization*

According to Daudigeos et al. (2018) the “second social process associated with scandals is to make public the irresponsible behaviors and practices of an individual or organization and to move it from the private to the public domain” (16). Some elements here have already been covered in the section above since, again, these are overlapping processes, but a few key observations can be made here to depart from the notion convergence. To be sure, convergence may precede the scandal as seen above, but it is only upon the denunciation that the social activities of norm contestation and justification, which effectively give the scandal its institutionalization powers, can begin. In the ZS, the denunciation came from the media and government alike: the show *A Liga* showed the Brazilian public some of the realities of workers stuck in conditions

contemporary slavery; whereas, São Paulo's legislative assembly, on a public note, invited Zara Brasil to speak to them in the human rights commission. This is important because, as Jean Baudrillard (2006:462) once wrote, "[t]he denunciation of scandal is always an homage to the law." The law (embodied by a legislative institution) and the main denunciators (the media) were indeed in perfect synchrony here.

Although Baudrillard is critical of the role of scandals in a capitalist society, accounts such as the present one may challenge some of his criticisms.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, as noted, Daudigeos et al. (2018) believe that scandals, when played right by the actors, may lead to change that is out of the control of the powers that be. "A corporate scandal, via the publicization of deviant practices, [1] reduces the targeted MNC's ability to repress fringe stakeholders' contentious actions [and (2)] makes the targeted MNC publicly accountable and forces it to formalize a policy to monitor and eradicate such practices" (16-17). Repórter Brasil and the journalists from Rede Bandeirantes not only had access to the sweatshops, thereby enabling them to shoot and publicize vivid pictures and footage of what slave-like conditions look like (extremely valuable resources for the scandalizers), they also were able to interview the CEO of Zara Brasil and Inditex's spokesperson – corporate elites that are hard to reach in an ordinary situation. São

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<sup>20</sup> Baudrillard (2006) arguably sees any scandal under capitalism as publicity stunts. That is, there is no institutionalizing power, there is only the re-institutionalization of already-established norm systems that uphold the existing, asymmetrical power relations between those victimized by scandals and those responsible for causing it. This is a poignant claim for those who seek change through scandal and it may, in fact, imply that the ZS itself lead to nothing but the maintenance of the status quo between a large MNC (Inditex) and a developing country (Brazil). The current thesis, however, attempts to show that although change was halted, there were mild reforms yielded by the ZS.

Paulo's state congress and labor prosecutors were also able to sit down with them and negotiate the CAA.

Publicization is demonstrably one of the most important processes happening in a scandal – in the drama of concealment and exposure, this process is marked by constant exposure from different angles and across time in order to sustain the public's attention and keep the avenues for response against the MNC open. However, the public's attention to a norm-transgression will likely not surpass what it was at the moment they first learn about the scandal – i.e., the moment of scandalization.

As suggested above as well, the way one publicizes a norm-transgression may make a difference in terms of whether it becomes a scandal or not (de Blic and Lemieux 2005). The language of scandalization here accusing Zara of contemporary slavery, a term that intrinsically carries part of the allusion to what is now known as one of the vilest things humans have ever done (i.e., slavery) was powerful enough to cause outrage.

### *Contagion*

Finally, the process of contagion can be seen as the contamination of other organizations and/or sectors by association with the accused party (who here was Zara/Inditex, a fashion-retailer). That is, the scandal might cause an outrage effective enough to mobilize institutions and people who can then transfer their discontent from the accused to its related parties (Daudigeos et al. 2018:17).

Contagion is important in the sense that it can lead to lasting scandal effects, to more scandals in the same area - or secondary scandals as some may call them (de Blic and Lemieux 2005). While Daudigeos et al. (2018) focus on the way that contagion may lead the accused party's possible allies to leave their side (something which happened in the sense that Zara tried to shift the blame entirely to AHA and Rhodes, the intermediary companies hiring the sweatshops' services for Zara), this study will focus on yet another aspect of contagion, namely the power that this process has to propagate the scrutiny to other sectors.

The most significant piece of evidence in this regard is the State of São Paulo's Legislative Assembly's response to the issue. In the first few weeks of the scandal they invite Zara to meet with their human rights committee, which Zara politely declined. In that occasion (Pyl and Hashizume 2011c), the congresspeople voiced interest in creating a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (PIC) which renders the state congress a temporary court able to summon with a subpoena, rather than just invite, Zara representatives and their lawyers. Although this took a few years due to bureaucratic constraints, the PIC was eventually installed in 2014. Their first subpoena was sent to the Zara Brasil CEO: he confessed that Zara was irresponsible back in 2011 and they fined the company again for violations of the CAA that happened in 2012 and 2013 (Ojeda 2014). This PIC, named the Slave Labor PIC, ended their activities within the textile industry in 2014 after a series of investigations which, again, started with the ZS, and subsequently moved on to yet another sector: construction (Santini 2014a).

To be clear, the CAA had been signed in the absence of a PIC, but it did suffer some changes which could have arguably been different had there been a less voluntary countermeasure. The CAA model is binding only by fees that are very small compared to Zara's revenue. That being said, the contagion effect observed was effective mainly through the

creation of the Slave Labor PIC that was able to carry some of the outrage against contemporary slavery forward, institutionally, through its protocols, know-how, and so on. Under this light, observers of the ZS (Campos et al. 2015) concluded that

[t]he authorities' approach in this case can be considered quite innovative in the Brazilian context. Zara Brasil was one of the first fashion retailers to be held legally accountable for slavery conditions of immigrants in outsourced sweatshops. [...] In subsequent years, labour inspectors found other fashion companies to be implicated in similar violations, showing that Zara's case is not unique (39).

The process of contagion, then, opened new ways of maintaining and enforcing antislavery law and reproducing the necessary cultural norms against slavery.

## DISCUSSION

The current study has analyzed the infamous 2011 Zara Brasil manufacturing scandal wherein a successful political alliance between civil society and public organs publicized that the multinational fashion brand Zara was committing grave labor infractions analogous to slavery in its production chain and converged public outrage upon the company. This resulted in the signing of a conduct adjustment agreement between the multinational and the Brazilian government and the creation of a parliamentary inquiry commission focused on prosecuting slavery-like practices by the São Paulo state congress. By focusing on how on-going and overlapping processes of (a) convergence of contention into a single target, (b) publicization of deviant acts, and (c) contagion of public scrutiny to other organizations and sectors (Daudigeos et al. 2018) influences the actors' ability to effect lasting social change, one can see the ZS as illustrative of how the specifics of the inner-workings of a scandal can help explain the lasting impact or consequences of the scandal as a whole.

To elaborate, the scandal was conceptualized as a social activity that gave social actors the opportunity to test the strength of the antislavery norm or how attached the Brazilian community involved was to this norm (see de Blic and Lemieux 2005). In this context, this thesis asked two main questions. First, to what extent were fringe actors (without direct decision-making power) able to participate in this norm test? Second, with what degree of confidence can one infer social change as a consequence of the scandal? In order to address these questions, the three processes theorized by Daudigeos et al. served as axes of comparison for reflecting upon the ZS data. The concept of convergence therefore could be observed in terms of the focused targeting of Inditex (Zara's parent-company) by the media and prosecutors: this facilitated the political alliance between the legal and civil society bodies to narrow the scope of the issue as Zara's responsibility. And although convergence and publicization are intricately connected, the latter nonetheless conceptually branches into elements of the scandal pertaining to communications strategy and framing of the situation. Here, then, the ZS was marked by the centering of the problem on the issue of contemporary slavery and what it meant for (a) the Brazilian penal code and legal-institutional capacity to deal with the problem as well as (b) the morality of those who consume fashion items from large multinational brands like Zara.

Daudigeos et al. defined those three conceptual processes as catalyzers of opportunity in the context of corporate scandals such as the ZS. That is, actors are considered to be more-or-less capable of harnessing the potential of these processes as means of opening space for political action. There are, of course, political, practical, technical, and institutional obstacles to publicizing deviance, converging contention, and inspiring contagion of discontent; hence, it befalls to individual actors the task of navigating through and around these constraints in order to effectuate change. And although the findings of this thesis largely support the theoretical

framework described by Daudigeos et al., it also offered evidence pointing to further discussion, especially in the realm of social change. In this regard, there are two key concepts which, when applied to the ZS context, might be empirically challenged at first to then arrive at a more nuanced account.

Let us first dwell on the notion of fringe stakeholders/actors, i.e., those who have been conceptualized here as participants in the scandal activities in spite of their lack of direct decision-making powers (i.e., civil society members like NGOs). Daudigeos et al. (2018) seem to suggest a theoretical conflation between NGOs and unions since they are fringe to the political and corporate decision-making procedures and apparatus. These organizations are the ones whose involvement in scandal activities and, importantly, the scandal resolution is facilitated by the processes of convergence, publicization, and contagion arguably. In the ZS, the NGO Repórter Brasil definitely benefited from these processes in that they were present in the labor inspections but (a) they remained very much in the sidelines when it came to any negotiation regarding, say, the CAA and (b) they are not a labor union although they lobby diligently for workers' rights. As Veiga and Galhera (2017) regretted,

the tragedy of the Rana Plaza building and the sweatshop case in São Paulo have a trait in common: paradoxically, workers involved did not participate, in any moment, in the process of decision making for the betterment in the governance and regulation, monitoring of health and safety standards, and even in the denunciations of work analogous to slavery (158).<sup>21</sup>

That is, the survivors who were directly affected by the abuses were not part of the solution at any point. They all received a portion of the wages they were owed by the manufacturers who

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<sup>21</sup> Author's translation from: "A tragédia do edifício Rana Plaza e o caso dos sweatshops em São Paulo guardam um traço em comum: paradoxalmente, trabalhadores(as) envolvidos(as) não participam, em nenhum momento, do processo de tomada de decisões para a melhoria da governança e da regulação, do monitoramento de padrões de saúde e segurança e, mesmo, de denúncias de trabalho análogo à escravidão."

had imprisoned them and went their separate ways – with some being taken in and helped by unions and immigrant-assistance NGOs (Pyl and Hashizume 2011b).

That is a problem because arguably the people who experienced the abuses might be capable of providing insightful information to the ones trying to find a solution to the problem of contemporary slavery (Veiga and Galhera 2017). Nonetheless, and in light of the second concept to be discussed here, namely, contagion, Repórter Brasil was a central piece in this scandal - not for their decision-making capabilities but for their thorough coverage of the story and questioning of the culprits (i.e., the Zara businesspeople). Hence, although it was not a union who stepped in to represent the survivors, one should not overlook the role played by Repórter Brasil. This is especially true in the sense that contagion did indeed happen; the ZS helped raise awareness to the problem of contemporary slavery in the textile/fashion industry in Brazil, in particular because this issue is so often associated with rural contemporary slavery (a more ancient and perhaps more common issue in the country) rather than urban exploitation (Campos et al. 2015; Rainforest Foundation Norway and Repórter Brasil 2018).

Contagion was also salient in the sense that the ZS prompted the state congresspeople in São Paulo to organize a PIC targeting slave labor in the textile industry (Santini 2014b), which then moved to the construction industry (Santini 2014a). This is important because it created jurisprudence for a type of state involvement in the affairs of a large MNC still uncommon in our globalized world (Campos et al. 2015) – particularly as an initiative coming from a developing country who might fear losing the economic benefits of hosting a very profitable foreign enterprise such as Zara (Nolan and Bott 2018). The CAA and, a few years later, the PIC were arguably valuable steps (even if short) towards a higher level of labor reform. This type of

governmental crack-down on MNCs is what has been leading to changes in, for example, Bangladesh after so many deaths of workers (see Anner 2018; Nittle 2018).

Still, Veiga and Galhera's (2017) keen observation that there was no labor union or other labor organizations directly sitting down at the negotiation tables is a sign that there are some key changes waiting to happen. The GSC system, along with fast-fashion and similar 'buyer-driven' models in other industries, seem to only lead to deregulation and violation of labor rights (Barrientos and Smith 2007; Costa and Borin 2018; Harvey 2005; Herod 2000; Parente et al. 2017; Roussenq and Lins 2018). Under this critical gaze, instances such as the ZS, wherein the scandal processes featured in this analysis, enable participation of organizations otherwise left out of any solution process are very important to study. Importantly, when asked whether Zara had plans of building their own manufacturers in Brazil, the company's CEO answered that they did not, even after the ZS, since the fast-fashion philosophy entailed outsourcing (Hashizume 2011b). Furthermore, even without manufacturers of their own, which could have arguably been a valid reason to distrust outsourcers, Zara Brasil never signed the Brazilian National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labor until the ZS resolution. In other words, leading up to the ZS, the company only had internal auditing measures whose inefficacy the federal labor auditors, investigators, and Repórter Brasil were quick to point out (Pyl and Hashizume 2011a). In 2010, that is, the year before the scandal, Inditex did 1,087 "social audits" around the world, but only nine were in Brazil and none had had follow-up visits (Inditex 2012:66–67).

### *Generalizability, broader implications, and future directions*

#### *Research*

As a BRIC country, Brazil might have more political-economic leverage to antagonize a multinational than other developing nation-states, but not so much that they would risk imposing truly powerful, game-changing sanctions such as expropriating the Zara Brasil business (nationalization), arresting chief officers, and so on.<sup>22</sup> These solutions are not covered in the type of corporate scandal we are used to performing. Future research could focus on how this coverage could change. E.g., first one could elaborate and expand the three processes (convergence, publicization, and contagion) into a three-stage model. What types of strategies harness the power of the three processes or stages best in order for the dynamics of the scandal to have different consequences and the scandal resolution to be more definitive for the deviance it condemns? There is an argument to be made that the antislavery norm is outdated (e.g., see Cruz 2018) – people are not legally owned by other people anymore therefore the semantics of the word slavery matter: basing an entire scandal on it may not yield the labor reforms necessary to end the issue as it stands today. That is, although labor abuses can lead to grave consequences for the workers' health, safety, and dignity, they are not chattel as slaves were during the transatlantic slave trade (Miers, 2003). This could imply that the processes of convergence and publicization should be informed by a new norm that is closely related to the realities of labor rights violations.

Authors (Cruz 2018; Roermund 2018; Zanin 2017) have proposed adopting the Marxist-feminist framework of labor unfreedom as a more inclusive label to a problem that is not just

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<sup>22</sup> The diffusion of responsibility across large bureaucracies such as GSCs helps divert attention from the fact that labor abuse is an occupational crime perpetrated by high-ranking businesspeople against lower-level workers; (Green 1990)

about separating slavery from non-slavery, but also about identifying how what may be seen as slavery exists, in fact, on the same continuum of labor unfreedom as formally-free, paid work. In other words, all work that must be done because without it the worker would not be able to feed him/herself is involuntary regardless of whether it is legal or not. This means that the problem is with the place of work in society as the means of surviving rather than this or that industry having ‘bad apples’ so to speak. In this way, a norm that encapsulates that concept (e.g., an anti-labor unfreedom norm) might be more effective in starting discussions fruitful enough to counter structural forces creating contemporary slavery (i.e., global inequality or gender discrimination). Antislavery law might be effective in condemning and perhaps mildly punishing MNCs (such as what happened with Zara), but it does not change the labor landscape for the poor, minorities, and disenfranchised. As a result, MNCs such as Inditex/Zara might be caught exploiting their laborers one year (Pyl and Hashizume 2011b) and then again the next year (Hashizume 2012), and the next (this time in Argentina; Santini 2013), and so on (in Turkey; Young 2017).

On the same note, one element that studies on social change/reform regarding labor abuses seem to always emphasize is the importance of the state in the resolutions. As Suzuki (2017) demonstrated in the case of Brazil, the current antislavery legal and institutional framework (with specialized organs and the Dirty List) was only possible after significant international and domestic lobbying. That is, change only occurred when the state got involved. A similar finding has been noted here: the São Paulo state congress was particularly important in the resolution of this issue. It might be safe to assume that Zara’s auditing and labor conditions standards would not have been addressed by the company had there been no CAA and zero sustained governmental involvement (Campos et al. 2015).

### *Policy*

Policy-makers, informed by research, could question what types of political alliance work best in the case of scandals. E.g., Repórter Brasil had the Pact Against Precariousness and For Decent Employment and Work In Textile Production Chains which granted them special access to the scandal activities (from the investigations to the trials in congress). Additionally, public relations and communications professionals in government could, instead of acting as image managers, incorporate the scandal actor capacity with the goal of harvesting the scandal potential according to the expressed needs of the community involved. That is, stop trying to save face and start dismantling the very foundations of the face or façade being protected. If a norm-breach occurred (e.g., serious labor infractions), then all parties involved failed to enforce the desired norm standards be it by actively breaking the norm or not enforcing it enough. The scandal gives an option to move on from this instead of recycling outdated procedures such as CSR.

In this regard, Brown (2017:134) provides a comprehensive list of changes that could revitalize the GSC system in how it relates to nation-states:

Examining global supply chains in multiple industries and countries, it is clear that broad-based and sustainable improvements in working conditions can only be made if the following steps are taken. 1) Replace the dominant “sweatshop business model” consisting of the “iron triangle of sourcing” (lowest possible cost, highest possible quality, and fastest possible delivery); sharp annual decreases in the per-unit prices paid to suppliers; and the deliberate overloading of factories that forces suppliers to subcontract part of the production order in order to avoid stiff financial penalties for missing delivery deadlines; and align actual sourcing practices with the stated objectives of the corporations’ codes of conduct. 2) End the reliance on ineffective and corrupted CSR audits, and develop and implement “worker-driven social responsibility” programs, with one example being the Bangladesh Accord. 3) Support national

governments' efforts to establish and enforce effective occupational health and safety regulations as part of comprehensive labor laws to protect the health, safety and rights of all workers in these countries. 4) Establish and nurture genuine worker participation in the development, implementation and verification of factory level [occupational health and safety] and social responsibility programs.

Notably, the author calls for much more worker participation and less contradiction between MNCs' expressed value and the businesses they actually make. He also underscores the importance of national governments in the inspection of work places. Indeed, the ZS is an example of how the private auditing provided by Inditex was visibly inadequate (or corrupt as Brown defines it above) in that it took federal agents to raid the sweatshops and classify them as exploitative to bring forth the labor violations (Campos et al. 2015). The list of items above summarizes the needs of global production systems evidenced by cases such as the ZS.

### *Conclusion*

Looking at the different scandal actors and their roles and three scandal-related processes (convergence of discontent into a single target, publicization of deviant acts, and contagion of discontent to other actors and areas of social life) helps understand the potentials for social change enabled by corporate scandals as well as the institutional stagnations which unfortunately often occur in their wake. The processes of convergence, publicization, and contagion were instrumental in bringing the ZS to the level of a scandal that was able to bring some change to the issue of labor abuses by MNCs. The participation of a fringe stakeholder like Repórter Brasil, short of participating in the CAA negotiations, was evocative of an evolving procedure of response to the types of infractions committed by Zara and so many other large corporations which might normally go unnoticed.

With reason, the contagion of discontent spread from Zara to other textile companies and, finally, to yet another economic sector, that of construction, can be seen as a building step for how outrage can be harvested and institutionally channeled to effect reforms. The PIC brought with it some jurisprudence, some protocols, and the ZS event as a whole brought forth the cultural norms surrounding slavery-like labor abuse (or its immorality) thereby allowing the Brazilian and international audiences to revisit their commitment to it. Contagion has a positive valence in a sense: actors may successfully direct discontent and the know-how/experiences learned from dealing with the scandal ordeal towards other similarly deviant parties.

Therefore, although all that Zara/Inditex suffered were some temporary bad publicity and meager fines, their performance in the scandal (denying responsibility, diverting attention, amending the originally-proposed CAA) provided important data on how cognizant MNCs are of their roles in promoting contemporary slavery. There was strategy throughout the affair: the scandal was educational to Zara, not in terms of some social-democratic ethos, but in the ways that they could save face in future scandals without paying the prices they paid in the ZS. However, their interactions with the Brazilian government were educational to both parties as well as to critical observers – just as the MNC learned a bit more about how to strategize and prepare for these scandals, so did the labor auditors and politicians behind the PIC. One day, perhaps, the scandal will be about the limited reach that NGOs and governments have in solving problems such as contemporary slavery. When this deviance (in the sense that it permits continuous breaking of antislavery law and its adjacent cultural norm) is taken as seriously as the labor infractions were in the ZS, then perhaps the scandal resolution there will enact more conclusive reforms.

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