

5 Corporations as Players and Arenas

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Dissatisfaction with the contentious politics framework has been voiced time and again. Perhaps reflecting the rules of the academic arena, opponents of the dominant model have – while raising fundamental points – mostly used moderate action forms and pursued a reformative agenda, if at times spiced up with provocative language (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; McAdam et al., 2001; Fillieule, 2006; Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008; Goodwin and Jasper, 2012). The classic agenda offers a mostly static and dichotomous analysis. Some of the founding case studies trace movements over time (McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1989), but they tend to stress changes in structural factors over the dynamics of contentious action. Even studies of waves of contention (Koopmans, 2004) mostly build on aggregate data of individual protest events and fail to address the relational character that link one event to the other, different collective actors in those events, and actors with each other in networks or coalitions (for a similar point, see Diani, 2011). The static analysis has, in addition, led to a perspective where a movement's targets are pictured merely as context (Jasper, 2012).

To use a sports metaphor, the dominant conceptualization of social movement activity resembles a tennis player firing balls against a wall. The tennis player is the social movement, using different tactical action repertoires – slice, stop balls, lobs – and having specific resources and skills. His opponent, meanwhile, is pictured as a wall: exhibiting certain structural characteristics – the wall may be made of uneven concrete, with spots where the ball rebounds particularly well – it is incapable of strategy, it cannot “play.” It is time for a dynamic perspective where the tennis player has another tennis player as her opponent; both can adapt to the repertoire of shots from each other; sometimes doubles are played and the two players on each site have to coordinate; and a match can go on over several sets, where winning or losing one set does not necessarily mean losing the match. Emotions are important, and surprise shots may make the opponent lose his temper.¹

The tennis metaphor is apt to capture the dynamic aspect of protest and fits contexts where movement players mostly oppose their targets directly and contentiously. But a player's goals are usually not as evident as in a tennis match and may be multiple and even contradictory. In many cases strategies are not limited to contention, but may include forms of collabora-

tion, switching arenas (as when disputing the result of a game in a sports court) or the establishment of a new game, with slightly different rules, outside the first arena. In this chapter I build on the players-and-arenas approach to explore the interactions of movements and corporate players, using the example of an anti-sweatshop campaign in France.

As of late the analysis of movements and markets has greatly developed, as part of a call to study protest in other institutional arenas than the state (Van Dyke et al., 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008; Taylor and Zald, 2010). Markets are the site of a great variety of protest activity (Raeburn, 2004; Schurman, 2004; King and Pearce, 2010; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2008; McAdam and Scott, 2005; Soule, 2009; Soule, 2012; Walker, 2012). Movement players launch boycotts and public campaigns, develop and promote alternative forms of production and consumption, or collaborate with firms to change their practices. Corporations react to protest in diverse manners: they shut down production facilities, mobilize important communication resources to delegitimize protesters, try to infiltrate them, or use the judicial arena for processes against campaigners. But they also find themselves changing business practices, negotiating with movement organizations, creating new activities, investing in new markets. How does protest work when targeting corporate players? What kind of action repertoires are used by protest players? What actions do corporate players take to react to movement demands?

I start with a very brief overview of economic sociology's theories of corporate action in order to understand the goals and interactions of corporate players in market arenas. From there, I use the empirical study of the anti-sweatshop movement campaigns in France (and occasionally Switzerland) to show the interactions between movement players and discuss the functioning of protest in markets.

Corporate Players and Markets

Economic sociology and studies using it to explain the role of movements in markets for the most part do not adopt a strategic perspective. In opposition to neoclassical economics and also to some earlier organizational theories, the most important insight of economic sociology is that firms are seen as part of (or embedded in) networks, fields and institutional environments, which decisively shape their strategies and structure (Davis, 2005). Institutional theory and economic sociology have developed structural theories explaining stability in markets; studying tactics of avoidance or resistance

are not part of their traditional agenda (Campbell, 2005). This has changed, however, with growing attention to institutional change, including the role of institutional entrepreneurs and social movements (King and Pearce, 2010; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2008). Studies stressing the open polity of firms (Zald et al., 2005) encourage analysis of the strategic struggles *within* firms. Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) recent formulation of a general theory of fields further accentuates the idea of contentiousness and struggle within fields, whether it be everyday jockeying for positions or transformative change triggered by exogenous shocks. Their field perspective, however, tends to focus on interactions within a given field, while the players and arenas approach concentrates on players acting strategically *across* arenas.

Corporate players pursue different goals. In classic economic terms, a corporate player's only goal is profit. Balancing this view, economic sociologists have suggested corporate player's ultimate goal is market stability (Fligstein, 2001) to overcome the coordination problems at the core of markets (Beckert, 2009). They also point at corporate players pursuing symbolic goals: they care for their reputation and legitimacy with regard to social norms and institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), and build up corporate identities. Goals can be complementary: pursuing symbolic goals may favor profit because it avoids risks of public shaming by campaigns; building up corporate identities can help to create stability by establishing a niche, ultimately favoring profit. But goals are also often conflicting: a firm that cares for its reputation and therefore subscribes to a voluntary program of code monitoring may jeopardize its profits. Corporations can themselves be seen as arenas where different individual and collective (i.e., departments or offices) players face each other. Within such a corporation-as-arena, players may privilege competing goals and interact strategically to advance them.

Corporate players interact with each other within market arenas. The defining logic of interactions in market arenas is competition: corporations jockey for position and fight for market share, through imitation or differentiation, resulting in convergence and divergence of practices (Beckert, 2010). On the one hand, neoclassical and neoinstitutional economic theory expects all market participants in competitive markets to adopt the most efficient practices, pushing them to convergence. Institutional theory in sociology has put forward other mechanisms that provoke convergent practices among market players: coercion, normative and mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Firms come to imitate each other because they are submitted to formal rules, because of the attraction of models diffused through networks and professional groups, and through simple

imitation as a response to uncertainty. On the other hand, interactions in market arenas also lead to the adoption of practices of differentiation. To secure market positions, corporate players try to specialize and build up distinctive product and producer identities (Chamberlin, 1933; White, 1981).

Ultimately differentiation allows producers to create niches that avoid direct competition. This can also be achieved when firms cooperate and coordinate their actions. Cooperation can take many forms. It may be informal through interfirm networks, or be conducted through business associations, distinct players that represent corporations. Cooperation is also used to lobby state players for favorable legislation; in turn, states may fight against cartels and advocate competition. Cooperation does not necessarily involve all players of a market; there may be different competing groups that cooperate, such as chain retailers and small independent retailers.

When can we expect firms to do what? The characteristics of market arenas are likely to play an important role in the goals and strategies used by firms. In markets where producers cater to individual consumers, reputation is likely to be much more important than in business-to-business markets where corporations exchange goods with each other. This is especially true for markets with fewer players where brand recognition is high. The positions of corporate players within market arenas are also capable of shaping their strategies (Fligstein, 2001). Big and incumbent firms can be expected to be more conservative, to imitate each other's practices and possibly to collaborate to commonly defend their interests. This also means that when an incumbent firm actually changes its practices, it is likely to be followed by its immediate competitors (Briscoe and Safford, 2008). Smaller challenger firms may be more prone to strategies of differentiation and niche creation (Schurman, 2004).

Strategic Interactions of an Anti-Sweatshop Campaign

I will illustrate the advantages of the players-and-arenas (P&A) perspective with a social movement campaign targeting clothing retailers in France (with occasional illustrations from the Swiss case, too). The case study is based on interviews with key actors, publications by firms and the campaign, and the campaign archives. The study initially focused on campaign activity and data collection concerns mostly these players. Ideally, a symmetrical effort of data collection should have been done for corporate players – interviews with executives and officials involved in the interaction with campaigners, firm archives. Such symmetry, a key require-

ment of a P&A approach, proved difficult to achieve. Access to business executives, especially those with decision-making power, is more difficult than access to movement officials, especially for controversial and ongoing issues like production conditions. Even in interviews, the researcher is often confronted with formatted discourses that do not give insight into decision-making processes. However, this does not rule out an interactionist perspective insofar as publicly accessible sources (in particular press articles, firm reports, documents published by business associations, the information gathered by the campaign) allow us to reconstruct in detail the strategies employed by firms and business associations in reaction to campaigns.

In the following, I first analyze the rise of the French campaign and show how it used different arenas to fight for its goals. I then turn to the strategies its corporate targets used to fight back against the campaign, by building up a new player through cooperation. A quick look at the Swiss case highlights a different interaction dynamic with corporations competing over ethical records and creating a new market arena for ethical clothes. A final section brings together the insights from these illustrative cases to put forward the contribution of the P&A perspective to understanding movement-corporate interactions in markets.

The Formation of the Player

In France, the campaign that would later be part of the European-wide coordinated Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) started as a project by one fair trade organization to launch its own public campaign on the broad issue of “conscious” consumption. The exact outlook of the campaign owed much to historical circumstances. At the time – the early 1990s – anti-sweatshop campaigns had started to appear in the US and some European countries, especially the Netherlands. In France, the debate on production offshoring was vivid, with prominent cases of factory closings in the textile sector. And there were ongoing discussions among development aid organizations and unions about the possibility of adding a “social clause” to the General Agreement on Taxes and Trade (GATT), that is, the obligation of trade partners to respect minimal labor standards set by the International Labor Organization. Finally, the European Union was funding civil society initiatives promoting “citizen-consumption.”

In this context, the fair trade organization drafted a proposal for a public campaign for consumer mobilization targeting clothing retailers.

From the beginning, the organization sought to enroll other players to the campaign to form a coalition, both in order to secure public funding and with the rationale that the broader the coalition, the larger its appeal and legitimacy. The coordinator of the campaign therefore explicitly sought out reform-oriented actors such as a Catholic development aid NGO and the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (French Democratic Confederation of Labor, or CFDT) rather than radical unions like the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour, or CGT) or Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques (SUD). The result was a coalition that brought together movement players with very different backgrounds (consumer associations, unions, development aid and solidarity organizations), which, in the eyes of the coordinator, was most likely to have an impact on clothing brands.

Fighting against Sweatshops in Different Arenas

The nascent French Clean Clothes Campaign chose to place its actions in the market arena. It wanted to fight for improving working conditions in the global garment industry, but it also had as a goal the promotion of a political form of consumption by making the issue of production conditions an aspect of consumption decisions. Questioning firms about their practices constituted a novel and promising strategy to raise consumer awareness and built on a repertoire of public campaigning that had recently emerged. Retailers were chosen as targets because they could be reached through consumer pressure. Thus, the choice of corporations as targets and markets as an arena for action was closely linked to the campaign's more immediate goals of promoting political consumption.

Other potential targets could have been chosen to achieve goals of improving worldwide labor standards: national and transnational policy-makers as targets would have brought the interaction to different arenas. At the beginning, especially the transnational arena was equally in the spotlight, as many NGOs lobbied national decision-makers for the adoption of a social clause in the GATT. Actions took place in both arenas: there was a sort of division of tasks between social movement players pursuing different yet complementary strategies at the same time. When it finally turned out to be impossible to achieve the adoption of a social clause through international regulation – when a majority of states clearly opposed such a measure and social movement players therefore no longer perceived any opportunities in the GATT negotiation process – the targeting of corporations and the

solution of “private regulation” through codes of conduct, standard setting, consumer awareness and independent monitoring organisms became the main strategy to advance workers’ rights in producing countries.

But the question of the arena in which claims should be raised was not decided once and for all. Three consecutive “campaign rounds” focused on clothing retailers, each one consisting centrally of a petition and attempting to pressure firms using consumer power and public opinion. After this, the campaign paused for a year with the goal of advancing negotiations with firms and building a model for independent monitoring. During this break, political players came into the focus of the campaign. Initially, it was due to an action that had nothing to do with the campaign. The children’s parliament – an assembly of kids taking place every year – passed a resolution to ban child labor in the production of school equipment. As is customary with these resolutions, a deputy went on to elaborate a legislative proposal based on it. This deputy asked the campaign coalition for help due to its expertise on questions of working conditions. For the coalition, this led to the developing of a campaign targeting municipalities. It demanded that municipalities adopt resolutions requiring minimal social standards for public purchases such as uniforms or school equipment.

This campaign, called “Let’s Consume Ethically for School,” targeted the local political players, in particular local deputies and local governments in their role as legislators, but with the ultimate goal of affecting municipalities’ purchasing behavior. Ethical consumption by these collective consumers should serve as a further incentive for producers to adopt codes of conduct. Local governments who adopted such resolutions eventually even became part of the campaign coalition, through the organization *Cités Unies*; thus they transformed from intermediate targets to allies. Some state-owned companies, such as *La Poste* (the French postal service) or *SNCF* (the French rail service), also committed to buying products respecting certain ethical standards (but without becoming part of the campaign).

The campaigns thus used the connectedness of local and regional political arenas and markets to create leverage for action (Evans and Kay, 2008), using local governments as collective consumers. But this action in the local political arena did not replace the campaign’s directly targeting corporations. Both ran in parallel. While local administrations act as consumers, they do not buy that many clothes, which reduces their potential impact. Worse, this leverage did not allow the campaign to reach the same targets as those at the center of its direct campaigns of denunciation, that is, the big retailers. Markets are structured into different niches (Aspers, 2010), each one constituting an arena. The denunciation

campaigns reached one such arena – well-known retailers competing with each other – whereas the action involving local administrations reached another one. Municipalities as well as state-owned companies don't go to the supermarket or branded retailer stores in the city center to buy clothes; they mostly purchase in a specialized market, constituted of middle-size firms producing working gear. In this market, a number of small firms adopted "ethical" criteria for their commodity chain. These firms were actually never directly targeted by the campaign as the big retailers were, but they adopted social standards at least in part because of the demand for ethical uniforms, that is, the change in procurement policies by municipalities and state-owned firms.²

After the break, the campaign launched a new round of activities targeting big retailers, this time with an evaluation of corporate players' ethical performances as the main tactic. The campaign makers wanted to renew pressure to push companies to yield to movement demands. The strategy of directly targeting corporations in the market arena only started to be questioned when, after about four years of campaigning, firms had crafted a counterattack, and the campaign found itself in a deadlock. The achievement of the campaign's main goals – having companies collaborate with protagonists from the campaign in an independent agency to monitor codes of conduct – seemed more and more unlikely, which put the coalition into a strategic dilemma over the arena where further action should be fought. Although ideological differences between organizations had been present in the coalition all along, they mattered little as long as the participants in the coalition perceived some chances of success of their strategy. All of them agreed on targeting retailers in the market arena through consumer pressure. Now, facing the strong counterstrategy by the targeted retailers, such chances seemed to dim, and coalition members started to break apart. The moderate organizations in the coalition still wanted to continue on the same track and opposed more radical ones – in particular, the founding of a fair trade organization – who wanted to adopt a much more critical attitude. The former feared that such an attitude would foreclose any possible collaboration. The latter, on the contrary, wanted to drop the goal of collaboration and pushed for a political strategy – an arena switch to the political arena (national or European) – advocating for legislative action. However, it was not clear how that should work, as nation-states do not have legislative power over subcontractor firms in textile production countries such as China, Bangladesh, or Guatemala. In the end, the campaign coalition ceased its activity due to financial problems, which cut short these discussions.

Choosing Corporate Targets

Within the market for clothes, the campaign coalition had to choose its targets. Given that any market is composed of several players, the selection of targets is tricky for social movements. On what criteria was this selection based, and what consequences did the selection have? The goal of the campaign was to target the *entire* clothing market, but its petitions needed a specific addressee. For the first one, the campaign organizers picked three companies without any particular justification; one of them was not even a French firm. It turned out that this created some confusion: were these companies particularly bad concerning production conditions? And did that mean that others did better? Officials of the targeted firms complained about that, and the campaign makers (unofficially) admitted that they had made a mistake. For the second round, they picked three companies on more objective criteria: three leaders of three sectors – mail-order businesses, specialized stores, and sports retailers; in addition, a business association was also explicitly targeted. The idea, again, was that these firms stood for a broader trend in the whole market. For the third petition, big retailers – specialized sports retailers and general retailers – became the main focus. Those firms would then remain the main targets.

What was the thinking that drove this target selection? Two criteria were crucial: first, the public visibility of a company – the campaign targeted brands that were known and could be linked to broader issues, such as sports wear retailers when the campaign takes place during the World Cup. Second, prior public commitments made a company become more likely to be targeted. For the second petition, the campaign targeted companies that had shown “an interest” in the issue by contacting the campaign. To the campaigners, this signaled that something could be achieved with such companies. The firms that had publicly engaged themselves could then be held accountable against their own standards, using the “accountability politics” strategy identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998: 17). Paradoxically, the more a firm did, the more it came under the spotlight of campaigners.

Focusing on these targets had important consequences for the campaign. It meant that its opponents were powerful companies with a strong business association behind them. Through this organization, they would start collaborating and put in place a counterstrategy to oppose the campaign. Thus, what was at first a reaction to some encouraging signs turned, with the strategy employed by the campaigns, to a major drawback for the campaign coalition.

Fighting Back: What Corporate Players Do

Corporations reacted with an array of strategies. At first, they ignored the movement or denied responsibility (Barraud de Lagerie, 2010; Merk, 2007; Featherstone and United Students against Sweatshops, 2002). But quickly, many yielded to demands by adopting codes of conduct. They seem to have realized that this measure alone did not imply much beyond a public statement. The concession was mostly cosmetic (Soule, 2009), with minimal concession costs (Luders, 2006). The two biggest French retailers, Carrefour and Auchan, reacted most to the campaign; others did nothing beyond adopting a code. Carrefour started a program to attest to its respect for human rights in partnership with a human rights NGO that was not part of the campaign. By cherry-picking a competing social movement player and associating with it, the retailer thus sidestepped campaign demands and tried to divide its opponent. The organizations in the campaign coalition were extremely critical of this partnership and dismissed the NGO as selling out. Auchan later also attempted to establish such a partnership with Amnesty International. But at that time, Auchan had already agreed to collaborate with the campaign coalition, working on the improvement of labor standards in some production factories. Training sessions with buyers were organized with the goal of raising their awareness of social issues, and several visits to factories producing clothes for Auchan were carried out. This was the biggest success of the campaign, but it fell very short of an encompassing monitoring system and revealed the gap between the participants' goals and their favored means.

Was it because of the difficulty of finding a common ground that Auchan ultimately abandoned the project? Two other reasons seem just as important. First, the campaign lost its "internal ally" within the company, namely a manager (and a member of the firm's board) who had once served in a socialist cabinet and who was sympathetic to the campaign's cause. When he left the company, the collaboration lost its advocate. Second, an alternative response had been elaborated by the interest group FCD (which regrouped the main French retailers, including Auchan and Carrefour). They built up a common program of social auditing, called Initiative Clause Sociale (ICS). Auchan ended up relying on the ICS and so collaboration with the campaign was no longer necessary and even incompatible with this joint response by retailers.

The move by the FCD and the creation of a monitoring initiative meant that there was now a new player in the game, one that federated many of the campaign's most important corporate targets. What drove the firms to cooperate? In the past, the business association had dealt with a number of

“collective action problems” the retailers had faced, such as quality control. There was thus precedent for the FCD playing such a role, especially in the context of movement pressure (Bartley, 2007). But one would need to conduct more research to gain insight into the decision-making process that led the FCD to take the lead in this interaction with the campaign, and to see the role of corporate players in this process.

At first, the ICS could be seen as a technical solution to the problem raised by the campaign. Retailers came up with a joint way to monitor codes of conduct, using social audit firms. The campaign coalition got mixed signals from this newly created player, and hoped with good reason that it might get to participate in its work. The campaign was invited to presentations and other meetings with the ICS. In other words, intercorporate collaboration did not rule out collaboration with the campaign. This only came about in further interaction, as the ICS became a counterstrategy to exclude the campaign. Launching, in 2001, the first ranking of retailers giving them grades according to their “ethical performance,” the campaign wanted to increase ethical competition between the retailers. The goal of the rankings was to push firms with poor grades to do better in the future to catch up with their competitors. But the intercorporate collaboration undermined this tactic. The ICS turned out to be an astute strategic response because it avoided competition among firms on this issue. With all retailers joining the same program and having the same social standards, none of them stood out by positioning themselves as particularly “ethical.” In other words, the joint response made it very difficult for the campaign to use the strategy of dividing the opponents into good and bad pupils.

The campaign sanctioned the lack of progress (that is, the fact that none of the firms was willing to agree to independent control) by degrading companies with every new edition of the yearly rankings. The firms perceived this as a provocation and refused to cooperate with the campaign, eventually refusing to answer their questions regarding their business practices. Turning to the media arena, the ICS held a press conference on the same day the rankings were released. It published an open letter defending its approach and accusing the campaign of turning the “noble” issue of ethics into a matter of competition between retailers. They also attacked the campaign’s legitimacy and competence in this matter. The counterstrategy of the firms thus ceased to be limited to the technical realm of the issue and became one of publicly fighting back against the campaign’s actions in the arena of mass media. Overall, the dynamic observed resembles one of early (albeit modest) gains that subsequently get lost as targets join forces and organize their response (Jasper and Poulsen, 1993).

Consumers and Markets

The strong reaction by the French retailers was thus provoked by the ratings, which allowed potential consumers to distinguish between more or less ethical firms. This tactic was introduced into the campaign at the beginning of the year 2000, after three consecutive petitions. The petitions had singled out specific targets, but they were framed as a general claim; they did not imply that the targeted firms were behaving particularly badly, nor did they explicitly differentiate between firms. The firms interpreted the rankings as more threatening than the petitions. Rankings are a market tactic, based on the model of product evaluations by consumer organizations. They give consumers the tools to make informed purchasing choices – in other words, to boycott or buycott firms (Micheletti, 2003). Although the French campaign gave bad grades to all evaluated companies, there were still distinctions, and letters by consumers written to the campaign makers suggest that they were interpreted that way (Barraud de Lagerie, 2010).

The mobilization of consumers and the creation of tools like rankings that make it possible to incorporate political dimensions into consumption decisions is a specific tactical action repertoire movement players can use in market arenas (Balsiger, 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013). But while rankings can threaten firms, on the flip side they also potentially reward those firms that do better than their competitors. In France, retailers refused to play this game; by cooperating with each other, they managed to avoid making ethics an aspect of producer differentiation. This worked because all the important corporate campaign targets were collaborating, thanks to the prominent role of the business association.

A look across the border shows what can happen if this is not the case. There was also a branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign in Switzerland, raising the same claims and using similar tactics. But instead of cooperating with each other and shielding themselves against forms of “ethical” competition, some of the targeted clothing retailers in Switzerland actually started developing specific offers for “ethical” consumers. Doing so, they, too, only partly responded to the campaign’s claims. They sidestepped them by producing clothing lines that were particularly ethical, while few changes were made on the commodity chain of all the other products. This led to the development of a niche market for ethical clothes. Other movement players – NGOs not part of the campaign – played an important role in this development, as they collaborated with firms to develop socially and ecologically responsible commodity chains for fair trade and organic cotton.

The Swiss example highlights market-based responses by corporations and shows how targets can use competing movement strategies to their benefit. There is a potential conflict between forms of collaboration between movement players and firms, such as organic and fair trade labels, and the Clean Clothes Campaign's goals: for firms, the development of niche markets for ethical goods is a strategy to avoid demands for more encompassing change. The development of a fair trade label for cotton, in which many Swiss development aid NGOs were involved, led to a sharp conflict with the campaign. This label threatened the campaign, but the campaign could not prevent its development. Firms could use such labels to sidestep campaign demands, thus playing different movement actors against each other.

The rise of this niche market is a byproduct of the campaign, which pushed companies to show they care about production conditions and raised awareness among consumers about this issue. It is further favored by the activities of competing social movement players and even state players that contributed financial support. The rise of a new niche market can be seen as the development of a new arena as a consequence of movement action. Firms create this new arena together with collaborating NGOs. The creation of the new arena changes the context for the original movement player, the Clean Clothes Campaign. It now has to deal with a novel context, characterized by the existence of a niche market for ethical clothes supported by competing NGOs.

In this modified context, the Swiss campaign's strategy reveals a recurrent strategic dilemma between promoting the development of alternative markets and fighting for more encompassing change on the mainstream market. In its rankings, "good practices" by brands and labels were put forward and recommended to consumers. One volunteer group associated with the campaign created an "ethical shopping map" to offer guidance to ethical consumers. But the campaign makers then refused to continue on this consumerist track and decided to refocus on denunciation campaigns. The concern that campaign makers had – and this was already a big issue during the first such consumer campaigns by the same organization in the 1970s – was that promoting alternative markets may create the impression that no more mobilization is necessary, and may thus have a demobilizing effect.

Movement Players: Building up Influence Chains to Attack Corporations

How do social movements target market actors and use market arenas as a site for protest? The case of the anti-sweatshop movement gives important

insights into this question. The campaign in France targeted firms directly and attempted to build up pressure to make them yield to its demands. It did so by building up influence chains (Zietsma and Winn, 2008) that allowed it to create leverage over retailers. These companies in turn should take responsibility for the working conditions at their supplier factories. In a way, retailers were thus only intermediary targets; the campaign used their power in the supply chain to improve working conditions at factories in developing countries that do not directly sell to consumers and are therefore difficult to target.

Within the market arena, the campaigns used two interlinked influence chains. First, it was based on raising the awareness of consumers and mobilizing them. The creation and articulation of a consumer demand for more ethical clothes should bring firms to respond. Second, the campaigns attempted to damage the reputations of firms by publicly questioning and denouncing their practices. The threat to corporate reputations should provoke change. These strategies thus belong to what King and Pierce (2010), in analyzing the “contentiousness of markets,” classified as contentious actions taking place in the market place. The privileged arena is the market arena itself, where consumer power and public shaming threaten profit and reputation.

Threats to reputation worked particularly well in the case of the well-known big retailers, as is shown by their strong reaction to the social record evaluations published by the campaign. This market consists of a limited number of players with high public brand recognition. The rankings for the first time directly named and shamed companies for their specific malpractices. The campaign hoped to pit the retailers against each other, driving them into an “ethical competition” and splitting what might otherwise be a united opponent. Such a consumerist strategy (building on the model of product quality tests by consumer associations) attempts to take advantage of both firms’ tendencies to differentiation *and* imitation in markets. Differentiation should lead some of them (especially small “challenger” firms [Schurman, 2004]) to adopt better practices to appear as a leader in this regard and gain competitive advantages; through imitation, other firms should come to adapt to this benchmark, which is put forward as an example to be followed by movement players (see also Raeburn, 2004).

While these influence chains take place in the market arena where firms compete, the campaign also tried to build influence chains *within* companies. Here, corporations appear as arenas composed of different players pursuing sometimes distinct goals. On the one hand, consumer

power itself can be seen as taking place within companies, especially when changing consumer preferences incite firms to adapt their offer. On the other hand, the presence of unions also offered the campaign a chance to bring up its demands from within companies. However, this was done in a very limited way. Within the CFDT, the cause was especially promoted by the textile industry branch, but French textile producers were not targeted by the campaign. Retailer employees, in turn, were much less unionized. In one specific case (a public shaming action directed against Carrefour with regard to a dramatic accident at a Bangladeshi factory), unionized workers who were supposed to promote the campaign were uncomfortable and rejected the focalization of the public campaign on their company, criticizing the campaign's attempt "to make Carrefour the scapegoat of all retailers."³

Influence chains were also built when the campaign succeeded in finding internal allies. Movements may find sympathizers within companies who can be of great help in advancing movement goals (Dobbin, this volume; Raeburn, 2004) or weaken advocates of opposing ideas (Weber et al., 2009). In the case of Auchan, the campaign had found an important internal advocate of its goals who pushed for a greater commitment to social responsibility of the company, and his departure cut this internal influence chain. Similarly, the development of corporate social responsibility departments may lead to the recruitment of personnel sympathetic to movement goals, although such departments are often used to conceive of alternative strategies bypassing movement demands.

Finally, the campaign took advantage of the connectedness of market arenas to other arenas and players. It began actively targeting local legislators to push for the adoption of ethical public procurement policies. In this way, legislative change could be used to put pressure on clothing firms and ultimately to improve working conditions in factories of the developing world. This strategy proved effective, but it reached different firms than the ones targeted by the other petitions and rankings of the campaign. Markets are structured into various niches subarenas; while one such niche could be reached via targeting local governments in their role as consumers, the broad retail market remained unaffected by this strategy, and the campaign had to continue targeting it through means of consumer and reputation pressure.

Table 1 shows the different strategies used by the campaign to target corporate players, distinguishing between the arenas where actions take place.

Table 1 Arenas and influence chains to target corporate players

Arena	Influence Chain
Market	Mobilizing consumers
Market	Damaging reputation
Corporation	Allies within companies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consumers – Unions – Sympathizers in management
Local politics	Local legislators to adopt ethical procurement resolutions

Corporate Players: Confronting and Sidestepping

The analysis furthermore points to the wide range of responses one finds among corporations targeted by movement players. Within corporations, the anti-sweatshop campaign as well as other initiatives around the promotion of corporate social responsibility often led to the establishment of new departments to specifically deal with these questions, i.e., devising strategies to respond to civil society demands. Thus, because such issues were relatively new in the European context, new players were created within firms or existing players were given new tasks.

As far as the reactions to campaign claims go, we can distinguish between actions of sidestepping, confrontation, compliance and ignorance (see Table 2). Ignorance means nonreaction, while compliance is its opposite: fully yielding to movement demands. Sidestepping is in-between: companies take up some of the demands, but usually leaving out the most binding (and costly) aspects. Confrontation, finally, has drawn the least attention so far. It means that companies attack movement players. It may be done by corporate players who have taken actions of sidestepping previously, or players who had so far chosen to ignore demands. It involves “hostile” actions where corporate players directly fight back against movement players by delegitimizing their claims and frames. When choosing confrontation, corporate players act similarly as countermovements opposing each other (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996; Bob, 2012).

Table 2 Corporate strategies when facing movement demands

Ignorance	Compliance	Sidestepping	Confrontation
Nonreaction	Fully yielding to demands	Taking up aspects of demands without fully complying	Fighting back

Ignorance was the targeted firms' first response. Indeed, for many of them the hope to sit out protest and let the wave of agitation and media attention pass was a successful strategy. Because movement players gradually focused on those firms that had given in to some aspects and could then be held accountable to these resolutions, those firms that did not react at all fell out of the spotlight and did not face any more public pressure.

Compliance designates firms completely yielding to movement demands. While some companies in other countries did decide to fully cooperate, in France we only find the first steps to such compliance in the response of Auchan. Quickly, Auchan's collaboration with the campaign coalition was supplanted by a form of sidestepping which ultimately led to confrontation. With the help of their business association, the targeted retailers built up a new player, the Initiative Clause Sociale. The ICS was first conceived of as a technical solution to the issues brought up by the campaign. Because it did not agree to associate the campaign coalition with its monitoring scheme, it sidestepped campaign demands, taking up some demands (adopting and monitoring codes of conduct) without fully complying (independent monitoring involving NGOs and unions). The ICS soon became a powerful player to fight back against movement attacks and eventually to openly confront the coalition. In particular, the ICS counterframed the issue by publishing statements that attempted to delegitimize the coalition and its tactics, and defending the approach pursued by the ICS. The campaign's goal to split the companies and lead them on a track of "ethical competition" thus failed; the strategy had the opposite effect – it brought companies to cooperate and to oppose the campaign jointly.

Firms used other strategies of sidestepping, too. In particular, they tried to cherry-pick more moderate social movement players for collaboration to sidestep demands. This is what Carrefour and Auchan were doing when they collaborated with human rights NGOs. Doing so, they broadened their own coalition by associating movement players. This strategy of "splitting the opponent" parallels attempts by movement players to bring some firms to cooperate, thus dividing corporations into good and bad, cooperative and confrontational. Finally, a different form of sidestepping occurs when firms create new market arenas by developing niche products that take up movement demands without fully embracing movement goals. This is what happened in Switzerland. The creation of this niche market benefited from the presence of competing social movement players whose tactical approach was not to denounce companies, but to collaborate with them by creating ethical labels (Balsiger, 2012). Corporations could collaborate with them and thus gain greater legitimacy in selling ethical clothes. As in the

cherry-picking collaborations above, sidestepping thus took the form of playing off different movement organizations against each other.

Making Use of the Players and Arenas Perspective

The players and arenas perspective highlights the strategic interactions between movement players and their targets. Through the empirical analysis of the anti-sweatshop movement in France, I show the heuristic use of this perspective for social movement analysis. In particular, it allows focusing much more on the exchange of moves and countermoves between different players involved and puts much more emphasis on the strategies used by targets – in this case, corporations – to counter movement demands and shape the further unfolding of the interaction.

Some processes identified in the case study point at general dynamics at work in movement-corporate interactions on markets. First, the analysis shows the importance of distinct market arenas that can be reached through different influence chains. The movement coalition in France focused on public campaigns targeting clothing brands and general retailers. But it also conducted a campaign targeting local legislators to change the purchase behavior of public agencies. Although pursuing the same ultimate goal, these two strategies reached different market arenas. The latter brought the issue of codes of conducts to the agenda of medium-sized firms specialized in the production of professional clothes, a market that could not be targeted through public campaigning. The public campaigns, on the other hand, proved useful to put pressure on firms catering to individual consumers and caring about their reputation.

Second, the cases thus suggest that the study of social movement activities facing corporate players should not be reduced merely to classic forms of protest such as those that are collected in protest event analysis; indeed, such forms – for example, demonstrations – may not be the most effective nor the most often used in this particular context. Paying attention to strategic interactions in different arenas thus points at the variety of protest repertoires across arenas or in different institutional environments (Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008). Public campaigns and in particular consumerist tactics such as boycotts, buycotts, brand evaluations or the creation of labels, seem to be particularly efficient forms of protest in market arenas. In consumer markets, they allow for the construction of leverage vis-à-vis firms, both in a negative and in a positive way through potential consumer rewards. When looking at the articulation of these

tactics within a given player or the social movement arena, one finds a specific dilemma for mobilizations in this tension between the promotion of alternative markets (be it indirectly through evaluations and other tools for political consumerists, or directly through the creation of labels) and protesting against existing market practices.

The players and arenas perspective furthermore proves useful to study the variety of corporate reactions to movement claims. The cooperation of French retailers and their attempts at counterframing and attacking the campaigners demonstrates how corporations fight back. Through their cooperation the companies succeeded in countering the movement player's attempt to pit them against each other; at the same time, they built up a common strategy that partly takes up movement demands and is designed to counter efforts to damage their reputation. The Swiss example shows what happens when firms choose differentiation by launching different ethical labels. This is a form of sidestepping whereby a new arena of ethical fashion as a niche market is created. It points to a recurring logic of the interaction between movements and corporations. What a movement player denounces – for example, animal rights in poultry factories, environmental pollution in the production and transport of food, genetically modified seeds, sweatshops, or the facility to watch porn on smartphones – can be taken up by existing or emerging entrepreneurs and turned into its opposite, thus developing an alternative product – animal welfare chicken, organic food, ethical fashion, or phones blocking X-rated content (Shamir and Ben-Porat, 2007). Often this process is described as the capacity of capitalism to feed itself from its critiques, which is true, but tends to underplay the fact that many movement players themselves actively promote the development of such markets and become crucial players in it – as entrepreneurs, makers of labels, and so on.⁴

Features of the market structure – the existence of a powerful business association in one case and the existence of two dominant and a number of smaller players in the other – as well as a diverging assessment of potential profits when adopting more ethical practices, may explain the different reactions observed in the two countries. In this respect, more future research should be done on the possible development of interaction routines between firms and movement players. More and more firms – especially big and transnational companies – now have whole departments that deal with politics, social responsibility, or risk management. An entire professional field has emerged around these issues. Through this, firms develop an expertise in dealing with corporate campaigns; they try to monitor movement players and are better equipped to react to campaigns. Investigating how this development affects interactions between movement and firms should be a research priority.

Notes

1. Tennis aficionados will enjoy recalling the legendary underhand serve by Michael Chang when playing Ivan Lendl in the 1989 Roland Garros fourth-round match, or his approaching the T-line while waiting for Lendl to serve. Destabilizing his opponent with these surprise moves, he wore out his opponent and eventually won.
2. One also needs to emphasize the role played by a “broker” NGO that specialized in accompanying small firms when trying to implement sustainability criteria on their commodity chain; this NGO, in addition, was importantly financed by a business association, La Maison du Textile, representing French clothing producers.
3. Quoted from the newsletter of the union’s section at Carrefour: *L’Hyper* 204/205 (May 27, 2005), <http://cfdt.carrefour.free.fr/carrefour/hypers/Hyper%20204.pdf>.
4. It is possible that a similar functioning can be observed in the interaction of movements with the state regarding the development of new policy fields. Here, too, movements provoke the making of new specialized policy areas where they come to play roles that go beyond contention. A well-studied example would be the case of AIDS policy.

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