

DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORIES IN GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS

The Sweatshop Regime

Labouring Bodies, Exploitation, and
Garments Made in India

Alessandra Mezzadri



The Sweatshop Regime

This book explores the processes producing and reproducing the garment sweatshop in India. Drawing from Marxian and feminist insights, the book theorizes the sweatshop as a complex 'regime' of exploitation and oppression, jointly crafted by global, regional and local actors, and working across productive and reproductive realms. The analysis illustrates the links between the physical and social materiality of production, unveiling the distinct circuits of exploitation corresponding to different clothing items. As these circuits change across India, on the basis of regional patterns of product specialisation, so does the logic of the sweatshop, its composition, the social profile of the labouring poor engaged in garment work, and their working conditions. Through the eyes of sourcing actors, the whole country can be re-imagined as a giant department store, with different garment collections exhibited at different floors, and created through the sweat of different sets of labourers.

Highlighting the great social differentiation of the garment workforce in factories, workshops and homes scattered across the Indian Subcontinent, the narrative also unveils the multiple patterns of unfreedom this workforce is subject to. These exceed narrow definitions of unfreedom mainly based on forced labour, which are becoming dominant in the debate on global labour standards and 'modern slavery'. By discussing interplays between productive and reproductive realms and processes of commodification and exploitation, on the contrary, the analysis highlights how social difference and unfreedom pre-exist the sweatshop and at the same time are also reproduced by it. It also highlights the role different actors – like global buyers, regional suppliers and retailers, and labour contractors – play in these processes. Indeed, the book depicts the sweatshop as a complex joint enterprise against the labouring poor, shaped and steered by multiple lords, and where production and circulation – of garments, processes and people – intertwine in manifold ways. It also shows how the labouring body is systematically and inexorably depleted and consumed by garment work, until it is finally ejected from the sweatshop. Finally, the book highlights how the study of India's sweatshop regime informs contemporary debates on industrial modernity, comparative advantage and cheap labour, modern slavery, and ethical consumerism.

Alessandra Mezzadri teaches at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her research interests focus on globalisation and processes of labour informalisation; materialist approaches to global commodity chain analysis and global industrial systems, labour standards and CSR; gender and feminist theory; and the political economy of India. She has investigated in depth the Indian garment industry over a span of ten years, and illustrated the different ways in which distinct regional sweatshops are formed and reproduced across the subcontinent.

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*To Bianca, who taught me about resistance.
And to Silvia, who taught me about resilience.
They are the roots of it all.*

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Despite its many labour regulations, India remains an extremely difficult arena for the upholding of workers’ rights. The current rise of the ‘Make in India’ agenda is unlikely to change this scenario, as it further reinforces the idea of ‘flexible’ (read cheap and informal) labour as being one of India’s key comparative advantages. In such hard climate, the work of many activists and labour NGO workers has been crucial, and is likely to remain so for many years to come. I engaged with many of them during the years, and learnt a lot from their political commitment and dedication. Special thanks to Pallavi Mansingh, Gopinath Parakuni, Ashim Roy, Aloysius, Rohini Hensman, Sujata Modi and Sanjay Kumar Singh. Thanks to the staff of SEWA Bareilly – Mary, Rochini, Sangeeta and Gulnaz – who greatly facilitated my work in Uttar Pradesh. Most of all, thanks to all respondents, in particular the many garment workers who dedicated precious time to answering my questions and who shared their stories with me, whilst endlessly toiling to cut, stitch, mend, embroider or pack stacks and stacks of clothes.

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List of Abbreviations

AEPC	: Apparel Export Promotion Council
BHG	: Bareilly Homeworkers Group
CEC	: Centre for Education and Communication
Cividep	: Civil Initiatives for Development and Peace India
CMAI	: Clothing Manufacturers Association of India
COTEX	: Consortium of Textile Exporters
CSR	: Corporate Social Responsibility
DCMSME	: Development Commissioner for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
DISHA	: Driving Industry Towards Sustainable Human Capital
EOI	: Export-Oriented Patterns of Industrialization
ETI	: Ethical Trade Initiatives
GATT	: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GATWU	: Garment and Textile Workers Union
GCC	: Global Commodity Chains
GGCC	: Global Garment Commodity Chain
GLU	: Global Labour Union
GPN	: Global Production Network
GVC	: Global Value Chain
HF	: Handwork Foundation
ILO	: International Labour Organisation
MFA	: Multi-Fibre Arrangement
NCEUS	: National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector
NCR	: National Capital Region
NHG	: National Homeworkers Group
NTUI	: New Trade Union Initiatives
SAVE	: Social Awareness and Voluntary Education
SEWA	: Self-Employed Women Organisation
SIHMA	: South India Hosiery Association

SMEs	: Small and Medium Enterprises
TEA	: Tiruppur Exporters Association
UNIDO	: United National Industrial Development Organisation
UP	: Uttar Pradesh
WTO	: World Trade Organization

Introduction

The Sweatshop as a Regime

Every day, as we clothe ourselves, we wear the endless circuits of exploitation at work in garment sweatshops. Who is in charge of these circuits; who is subjected to them; and based on which processes are such circuits created and recreated? To what extent do our jeans, jackets, sweaters and T-shirt hide common stories of exploitation, and to what extent instead do their seams and features conceal the struggles of different working lives, exposed to and consumed by distinct production practices? At its broadest, this book unveils the processes leading to the creation and recreation of the garment sweatshop in India, in the context of greatly differentiated garment commodities and markets. This is hardly a trivial exercise, given that, as astutely observed by Karl Marx (1990, p. 280), employers always carefully and jealously guard the mysteries and secrets of the ‘abode of production’, ‘on whose threshold there hangs the notice “No admittance except on business”’. These mysteries and secrets are particularly numerous in the garment sector, where the ‘abode of production’ is fragmented and organized in composite production circuits connecting different spaces of work and geographical domains. Admittedly, many of such mysteries and secrets – even some of the most repugnant – have been unveiled throughout the last decades by the work of numerous committed scholars, researchers, journalists and activists (recent contributions come from Hoskins, 2014; Seabrook, 2015). Lately, the *World Factory* has even become the object of a political play interactively illustrating our false commitment to ethical capitalism once this threatens profitability (see Paul Mason’s review in *The Guardian*, 2015). In many ways, one could say that this book simply aims at joining these critical voices by exploring the workings of the sweatshop in India, one of today’s great emerging economies whose success is undoubtedly happening on the shoulders of its millions of working poor.

However, while joining the numerous concerned accounts that attempt to describe the sweatshop and its impact, this book also aspires to *theorize* the sweatshop. In particular, the analysis developed in the following pages will try its best to convince the reader that the sweatshop must be conceptualized as

a *regime*. Namely, the sweatshop has to be understood as a complex system of labour subjugation and social oppression establishing a strong interrelation between different clothing ‘things’ and the people who make them across multiple (factory and non-factory) spaces of work; organized in a joint enterprise set-up and strongly managed by multiple global, regional and local masters; banking on a complex matrix of social differences and patterns of labour unfreedom spanning across both productive and reproductive realms; and implying greatly depleting effects on the labouring body of the workers involved. The analysis will aim to demonstrate that only by paying attention to the solid and capillary organization of the sweatshop as a regime one can fully understand its great resilience, despite the many attempts at intervention and regulation following industrial disasters and scandals in recent years. In fact, many interventions and regulations, particularly those based on corporate approaches – which can be gathered under the umbrella of CSR initiatives – may well have even reinforced the exploitative and oppressive mechanisms of the sweatshop.

The word ‘regime’ has been already deployed by studies aimed at unveiling the secrets of abodes of production. The most renowned attempt comes from the sociologist Michael Burawoy (1985), who deploys the term ‘factory regime’, as a dispositive encapsulating not only different relations *in* production – linked to the labour process – but also relations of production more broadly, as defined by the overall balance between capital and labour in a given society. Building on, and perhaps also going beyond his work, authors like Chris Smith and Pun Ngai (2006; see also Pun, 2007) have more recently turned their focus on labour regimes, hence shifting the attention from the factory to labour, while also accounting for realms of daily social reproduction of the workforce. Attention to the workings of labour regimes is also present in Henry Bernstein’s (2007) theorization of ‘classes of labour’ as the outcome of the complex process of proletarianization at work in contemporary capitalism and deepening patterns of labour informalization, and in the work of Jens Lerche (2007; see also Lerche, 2010), who develops this framework in relation to India (see also Pattenden, 2016). Other studies, particularly in the field of geography, have deployed the term, although perhaps in more descriptive ways. Moreover, some labour scholars have placed emphasis on single aspects of labour regimes, for instance on patterns of labour control (see Jonas, 1996, on labour control regimes) and how they relate to different forms of workers’ resistance (e.g. Anner, 2015).

While the concept of sweatshop regime I propose here clearly benefits from the work of many of these authors, it also aims at further expanding as well as delineating the social boundaries of the analysis. In particular, I deploy here

the term sweatshop regime rather than labour regime as this allows me to place emphasis on three issues, which are crucial for the development of this book.¹

Firstly, I deploy the term sweatshop regime to centre the analysis on garment production, which this book is concerned with. In reality, this rather simple correlation conceals a more ambitious design, namely that of stressing the strong correspondence between specific commodities – specific garments in this case – and the spaces of work and people composing and inhabiting the sweatshop. This link between the physical and social ‘materiality’ of production is a key thread running throughout the analysis, and it is presented as one of the first crucial components of the sweatshop regime. The term ‘sweatshop’ is also better equipped, in my view, to capture the process through which the garment industry has been able, across time and space, to always reconstitute itself as a realm of harsh labour conditions and relations. Briefly, emphasis placed on the word ‘sweatshop’ helps underlining the continuities in the oppressive and exploitative labouring experience generated by garment work. In stressing the poor historical record of the industry for workers, the analysis will also discuss the role of neoliberalism in ‘exporting’ the sweatshop across the world, drawing particularly, albeit not only, from the work of Silver and Arrighi (2001).

Secondly, in the characterization proposed here, the sweatshop regime is not only meant to be the expression of capital–labour relations, *in* as well as *of* production (Burawoy, 1985). It is also meant to encapsulate broader networks of oppression that exceed (or pre-exist) the constitution of ‘labour’ and ‘labouring’ in the sweatshop and that strongly shape them at the same time. These networks cross realms of social reproduction that are not only confined to the daily survival of the workforce (as in Pun and Smith, 2007) but that also include workers’ place of origin. Strongly shaped by social structures, divisions and differences, these networks are mediators of processes of working class formation (Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2001; Harriss-White, 2003) as well as constitutive elements of processes of accumulation (Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004). This emphasis on social reproduction also aims at capturing a glimpse of ‘embodied’ labour, not only as the outcome of given labour relations but also as their constitutive part. Moreover, it aims at including the signs of labouring hardship worn by the labouring body as yet another key component of the sweatshop regime; namely, as the ‘signature’ of the sweatshop.

¹ I have deployed the term labour regime in the past, and will most likely deploy it again (see Mezzadri, 2012, 2014a).

Finally, the expression sweatshop regime is also meant to allow for a more flexible consideration of the interplays between processes of production and circulation of commodities as well as people. The term sweatshop already evokes the resilience of mercantile, highly decentralized networks of production, of great importance in the development of the garment as well as the far older textile industry. Both processes of production and circulation are crucial for the workings of the sweatshop, particularly in shaping it as a joint enterprise where processes of surplus extraction are made possible and organized by a complex crowd of global, regional and local lords. For the development of this key aspect of the analysis of the sweatshop regime, as well as for the ways in which it articulates with the management of both 'free' and 'unfree' forms of labour, I draw considerably from the work of Jairus Banaji (2003, 2010) and Jan Breman (1996, 2013). However, the analysis of the patterns of unfreedom at work in the sweatshop regime combines debates on the formal subsumption of labour with considerations on the social traits of labouring (neo)bondage.

After arguing the case for analyzing the garment industry through the lens of its sweatshop, this book illustrates the distinct key features composing the sweatshop as a regime, by drawing from empirical evidence coming from distinct garment-producing areas. Each chapter engages with different theoretical debates and deploys different cases to illustrate its points. This means that this book does not differentiate 'theory' and 'evidence' in a top-down fashion, first elaborating an abstract model and then 'testing it' through cases. Rather, it interweaves theory and evidence throughout the narrative to unveil the key mechanisms of the sweatshop regime. Hence, only by the end of the last chapter the argument proposed will emerge in full, in all its complexities and nuances, and the theorization of the sweatshop as a regime will be complete. In my view, this was the only choice that could give justice to the many debates reviewed to capture the inner workings of the sweatshop, and to the great richness of the empirical narrative, collected in India across a significant span of time.

India is hardly only a case study here. Rather, the ways in which the complex political economy of India interplays and interacts but also reshapes how the supposed 'global' reality of the sweatshop is created and reproduced emerges as a key aspect of the analysis. In fact, it is an aspect that indirectly challenges conceptualizations of globalization and capitalism in general as abstract, disembedded realities. Empirical evidence on the workings of the garment industry in India interweaves inextricably with the theorization of each different aspect of the sweatshop regime. It is not a case that many of the authors greatly inspiring

this analysis – Banaji, Breman, Harriss-White, Mies – have worked extensively (or exclusively) on India. In fact, also adopting a view mainly centred on India, the garment sweatshop is best theorized as a regime, as one cannot understand the hardship of India's garment proletariat without considering the garments they produce and the entire set of relations of exploitation, commodification and oppression moulding the sweatshop, as they cross India's factories, workshops and homes, industrial colonies, slums and villages.

In order to capture the regional instantiations of the sweatshop regime in India, the analysis deploys the image of a giant, country-wide clothing mall, 'offering' its customers – buyers and all regional and local sourcing agents – multiple garment collections placed at different floors, represented by different regions of the country. The India garment mall epitomizes the correspondence between the 'physical' and the 'social' materiality at work in the sweatshop, and it is the starting point to analyze the corresponding regional variations in the ways the sweatshop manifests on the ground in the subcontinent. These regional manifestations depend upon the processes of informalization of *both* capital and labour at work in India (Harriss-White, 2003; Breman, 2013), whose history is in fact quite old (Banaji, 2003, 2010).

Under this light, the study of the sweatshop regime developed by this book also contributes to the study of the contemporary political economy of India, by providing a window into the ways in which aspects of the constitution of today's 'Global' India – namely, in this case, the country's engagement in modern global industries – are greatly based on a long-term development systematically banking on the subjugation of India's poor labouring masses. This point will be emphasized in the analysis to debunk ideas of the sweatshop that simply ascribe its features and resilience to global (western) actors and processes. The lords of the sweatshop are instead far more numerous.

The theorization of the sweatshop as a regime developed here also contributes to debates on cheap labour. In particular, it aims at deconstructing this weak analytical category, too often seen as a 'natural' comparative advantage of poor regions and emerging economies characterized by staggering social disparities, like India. I contend that this is a crucial exercise for two reasons. The first is analytical. While a lot has been written to debunk the rhetoric of comparative advantage in relation to commodities and shifting patterns of production and trade in the global economy in historical perspective (Shaikh, 2005; Chang, 2003), labour has been largely excluded from similar debates. Few noteworthy exceptions come from the feminist critique of free trade (e.g. Seguino, 2000; Elson *et al.*, 2007; Perrons, 2004), which has primarily focused on how liberalization has happened

on women's shoulders. However, more can be said on how the mythology of comparative advantage has reified working poverty. In particular, while rejecting representations of labour as a commodity, we should also be aware that such representations are powerful producers of real effects. Labour is fetishized as a commodity by capital through processes at work in both the realm of material production and of its representation.

This leads me to the second point, which is instead largely political. Only by deconstructing the myth of the existence of a comparative advantage in cheap labour for some countries one can attack modernizing narratives which are still charmed by the idea that the 'cheap labour model' will eventually, 'naturally' give way to forms of more 'inclusive' capitalism that will finally deliver for the working poor. The model itself is flawed, and largely ideological, based, as argued by Jan Breman (1985), on the paradoxical assumption that organizing capital is still the only way of organizing labour (see also Federici, 2012). Instead, an emphasis on the complex processes through which cheap labour is produced and reproduced, which lies at the core of this analysis, enables us to appreciate how capital is already greatly organized in its process of subjugating labour, even in highly informalized, chaotic settings. The book will return insistently on these issues, in relation to different aspects of the sweatshop regime. Moreover, it will further expand on the problematic nature of modernizing narratives in its conclusions, when it will also engage with debates on modern slavery and ethical consumerism.

The sources and categories deployed to theorize the sweatshop regime reveal that this analysis is clearly informed by a Marxist Feminist approach. Admittedly, political economy as well as feminist understandings of capitalism may vary considerably. This work specifically adopts a view on capitalism as a mode of production mainly defined by processes of extraction of labour surplus, which can manifest, as highlighted by Banaji (2003, 2010) in multiple *forms of exploitation*, combinations of 'free' and 'unfree' labour, as well as complex interplays between production and circulation. Undoubtedly, contemporary processes of proletarianization produce distinct 'classes of labour' (Bernstein, 2007). This said capitalist accumulation always banks on social differences and divisions (Silver, 2003; Harriss-White, 2003), and forms of social oppression starting from realms of social reproduction (Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004). Ultimately, the sweatshop regime theorized here epitomizes a vision of capitalism not as a homogenizing force but rather as a harshly dividing one, driven by and always reconstituting multiple forms of inequality. The embodied aspects of this force in 'producing affliction' (O'Laughlin, 2013) and consuming the labouring

body as a key capitalist ‘machine’ (Federici, 2004) clearly problematize benign visions of industrial modernization as an inherently positive process. In the sweatshop, systematic processes of depletion of the labouring body are even too visible. The way in which the narrative systematically combines insights from the political economy and feminist traditions is discussed in far more detail in each chapter, in relation to the different aspects of the sweatshop regime, and in the concluding sections of this introduction, which present the organization of the book.

On the Complex Social Life in Commodity Chains and Commodity Fetishism

In contending that the sweatshop regime is a more useful methodological and analytical tool than others in representing the harsh workings of the garment industry, the analysis cannot shy away from an engagement with commodity studies; namely studies framed around ‘global commodity chains’, ‘value chains’ or ‘production networks’. In fact, many studies of garment production have deployed this methodology, since its elaboration by Gary Gereffi and Michael Korzeniewicz (1994). Indeed, in this book, the literature on global commodity chains is deployed as a useful background to reconstruct the progressive development of the industry and its processes of geographical location and relocation, and to identify the multiple nodes of production (and power) that characterize it.

However, at the same time, the chain – namely the global garment commodity chain (GGCC) – is simply considered here as an *object of enquiry* rather than the leading analytical framework. It is the ground for the deployment of a Marxist Feminist analysis of the sweatshop. In this sense, this narrative clearly recalls the study of chains into the far broader framework of political economy (Mezzadri, 2014a, b). Moreover, the adoption of the sweatshop regime rather than the garment chain as the main lens of the narrative further shifts the emphasis from capital onto labour. The sweatshop regime is the *avatar* of the garment chain, a reconceptualization of the latter as mainly framed around labour and labouring aspects, as well as issues of social reproduction.

Admittedly, in recent times, a rising number of scholars have tried to overcome the widely discussed limitations of chain analysis in relation to its omission of issues of labour. Perhaps, the most systematic attempts to address this issue come from Marcus Taylor (2007) and Ben Selwyn (2010). Selwyn (2010, 2012), in particular, has proposed a chain framework reintegrating political economy concerns;

labour and class analysis in general (see also Smith *et al.*, 2002).² Other scholars have instead opted for moving away from the study of global commodity or value chains and focus instead on ‘global production networks’ (GPNs), a framework supposedly more equipped to engage with issues of labour (see Coe *et al.*, 2008; Coe and Hesse, 2013; McGrath, 2013; Barrientos, 2013; Carswell and De Neve, 2013).³ While recognizing the intellectual relevance of this scholarship, whose strengths and limitations ultimately depend – as spelt out by one of the ‘founding fathers’ of commodity chains Immanuel Wallerstein (2009, p. 89) – on avoiding the trap of ‘looking too narrowly’, a focus on the sweatshop regime rather than the chain itself allows framing the whole analysis and representation of garment production on the centrality of labouring.⁴ By focusing on the sweatshop, the analysis not only emphasizes the role of workers in commodity chains but it also does so by deploying a representational device already focused on labour.

Furthermore, this representational device maintains a strong concern with garment as a commodity. In fact, it is concerned with the many distinct commodities the broad category ‘garment’ entails, and stresses the links between different physical and social materialities of production. Obviously, I am aware that this choice can be accused of falling into the trap of ‘commodity fetishism’, a critique already moved to commodity studies (see Bernstein and Campling, 2006). However, I contend that this would be misleading. Focusing the attention on the ways in which the physical properties of commodities relate to the specific set of social relations of production serves the purpose of unveiling the workings of commodity fetishism, showing its relevance in shaping the world of labour. If indeed, as argued by Marx, commodity production fetishizes the world by concealing the relations of exploitation it entails, this process nevertheless does produce real and differential social outcomes, which must be shown and studied. In other words,

² For other important contributions of Marxian political economy scholars to commodity studies see, for instance, Newman (2009) on the financialization of the coffee chain and its implication for social relations (which also builds on the previous work by Gibbon and Ponte, 2005) and Starosta (2010a, b) on the relevance of the Marxian ‘law of value’ to understand the constitution and dynamics of chains. A number of institutional contributions to the debate have also greatly participated in unveiling the complex political economy of chains. See, in particular, Milberg (2008) on the interplays between finance and governance, and Palpacuer (2008) on the relation between financialization and the distribution of wealth along chains. A useful reader on different theoretical and analytical takes on chains can be found in Gibbon *et al.* (2008).

³ There is an on-going debate on differences and continuities of analyses framed on global value chains or global production networks (e.g. compare Bair, 2009; with Barrientos *et al.*, 2011).

⁴ The other founding father of commodity chains is Terence Hopkins (see Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1986; Wallerstein and Hopkins, 1977).

a crucial way to fight against commodity fetishism is to take it seriously, in all its distinct, crucial effects in the social world. This analysis is committed to this purpose. Indeed, as it will be amply illustrated, the different global, regional and local masters shaping the structure and functioning mechanisms of the sweatshop regime in India systematically bank on multiple, different forms of fetishism, targeting both commodities as well as people, namely workers. A notable example of processes of fetishization of labour is the way in which female labour is always deployed in certain tasks based on gendered discourses powerfully shaping the global assembly line (Salzinger, 2003; Caraway, 2005).

Despite not adopting chain analysis as its main methodological tool, the ways in which the chain is deployed here as the fruitful research ground for explaining the workings of the sweatshop can still, in my view, contribute to the literature on commodity studies. In particular, the approach proposed here can be seen as providing a glimpse into the chaotic social life within commodity chains, in regions defined by complex patterns of differentiation in relation to both product specialization and social processes of production. Indeed, great regional differentiation is a key aspect of commodity chains (see Smith *et al.*, 2002; Mezzadri, 2014b). Using the sweatshop as a lens, in other words, social life across the garment production chain can be seen as animated by multiple struggles between capital and labour, between ‘capitals’ and within labour, unfolding across and impinging upon multiple realms of both production and social reproduction, and bearers of depleting effects on the labouring bodies exposed to garment work. Together with the main aims and contributions of this book as delineated in the previous section, the way in which the sweatshop regime ‘brings commodity chains to life’ is another useful addition to the existing scholarship.

Methods: Seeing Labour through Capital and Capital through Labour and Reproduction

The analysis presented in this book is based on multiple rounds of fieldwork in India, which started in the early autumn of 2004, and continued across a span of almost 10 years. The first round took place between October 2004 and July 2005, and mapped the differences in garments production and labour relations and practices across the main garment-producing areas in India. During this period of intense and at the same time highly mobile fieldwork, 176 interviews were undertaken, and numerous industrial and labour reports were collected. Out of these interviews, 65 were with garment suppliers involved in export

(20 in and around Delhi, seven in Ludhiana, four in Jaipur, six in Kolkata, eight in Chennai, seven in Bangalore, five in Tiruppur and eight in Mumbai), and five with global buyers working across India. Crucially, the sample of garment suppliers in each area included some of the largest exporters. Towering over local production for many years, large exporters have detailed knowledge of the evolution of production systems and export markets over time. Moreover, they generally command complex production systems and can provide useful access to their 'subordinates.' The numerous other interviews conducted during this fieldwork round were with different sets of key informants, like representatives of apparel business associations; government offices linked to garment export or regulating the activities of small and medium enterprises (SMEs); unions, labour organizations, activists' networks and social auditing companies.

Detailed information on subcontracting and labour was also obtained through repeated field trips to industrial areas across India. I spent certainly long days walking around industrial areas like Gurgaon and NOIDA around Delhi or in Peenya in Bangalore, trying to grasp their pace and rhythm, and reconstruct the different logics through which the multiple regional masters of the sweatshop set up all the distinct parts of the product cycle, the same way in which the labourers they command stitch the clothes we wear.

Admittedly, the method described above is consistent with what many commodity studies scholars committed to empirical work have done (see Stephanie Barrientos' 2002 helpful discussion of how to investigate the chain). On the other hand, this method is also in line with what many sociologists have done during the years to unveil the workings of the abode of production in globalized industries. Indeed, the emergence of multi-sited ethnography, its strengths and limitations, has been a key object of discussion for both world-system scholars and scholars concerned with the process of 'manufacturing the global' (see Marcus, 1995; Burawoy *et al*, 2000, Burawoy, 2001). This is to say that the deployment of a fieldwork method compatible with chain analysis does not necessarily imply the adoption of chain analysis as the main analytical lens. Since this first round of fieldwork, the garment chain has been treated as a multi-sited terrain of investigation to achieve the main objective of reconstructing the nature of capital-labour relations in the sector and their implications for labour and labouring.

The second round of fieldwork, conducted between March and April 2010 and January and May 2012, focused on the complex patterns of local decentralization at work in the industry. It took the complexity of product cycles at work in Northern India as its point of departure, and focused on garment satellite centres

in Uttar Pradesh (UP). Thirty interviews with labour contractors organizing embroidery activities in Bareilly, UP, were undertaken, and 100 with home-based workers. This round of fieldwork was crucial to reach ‘the bottom’ of the sweatshop regime, which in India is fed by complex processes of proletarianization of artisanal work. If one learns much from a view from the top of the sweatshop, one also learns immensely from looking up from its bottom echelons. In fact, I must say that it is primarily from this vantage point that the sweatshop finally reveals itself in all its multiple facets and layers, as the complex joint enterprise against the working poor that it is. Moreover, it is from this vantage point that I could fully appreciate the ways in which processes of labour surplus extraction are so tightly linked to circulation, and how the many masters shaping the sweatshop anchor these processes to realms of social reproduction.

The third round of fieldwork was quite complex, and took me back to the Delhi metropolitan conglomerate. Between March and May 2013, and in September 2013, I analyzed current processes of transformation at work in the industry, and explored more in depth the world of non-factory labour in and around Delhi. These field trips overlapped with the far longer fieldwork exercise conducted in the context of the joint project ‘Labour conditions and the working poor in China and India’, led by Jens Lerche. The mapping of current transformations at work in the industry is based on interviews personally held with 17 exporters, 3 Indian retailers and around 10 key informants (2 global buyers, 1 major social auditing company and several representatives of India’s key export council).

Also in this case, the information obtained through the interviews was further complemented by other methods of enquiry, in particular by the informal interaction with exporters during one of their annual business meetings and two All-India garment export fairs, gathering companies working across India (see also Mezzadri, 2015a). The exploration of non-factory-based labour entailed the collection of interviews and questionnaires from 70 labourers, and numerous field trips to explore their daily conditions of reproduction (Mezzadri, 2015b). Ravi Srivastava coordinated the main data collection exercise in relation to workers in factories and larger workshops, based on a sample of over 300 workers placed in units of different size and spread across the Delhi metropolitan industrial hub (Srivastava, 2015). This analysis relies on the joint findings of the project in relation to wages, to labour contracting in factory realms, and to the links between health and social reproduction. The ways in which these issues connect and interplay is explored towards the end of the book, which specifically focuses on the hardship of garment work and the impact of the sweatshop regime on the labouring body.

Overall, the inspiring principles and methods at the basis of the different fieldwork rounds represent an attempt to combine a study of labour and labouring through the eyes of capital (Mezzadri 2009a, 2012) with a study of capital through the eyes of labour (see also Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015) and through the lens of social reproduction.

Finally, it should be noted that interviews and material collected in each location were not only functional to the study of the social processes of production in that particular site, but were also central to the development of a general picture of the sweatshop and its workings in India. In fact, the overall significance of the production and labour relations at work in the industry and their transformations is understood as a result of years of research, by way of triangulating evidence collected *across* all the different areas analyzed and deploying an organic approach to all material gathered, inspired by what Burawoy (1998) calls the 'extended case study method' and with the political economy tradition more in general.

Organization of the Book and of a Long Journey into the World of the Sweatshop

The book is organized as follows. Chapter 1, '*The Chain and the Sweatshop*', reconstructs the trajectory of the garment industry and its progressive evolution into a globalized chain stretching across a rising number of emerging and developing economies. It is here that moving the emphasis from capital to labour, the global chain is reconceptualized as the global sweatshop. The latter is the *avatar* of the former once emphasis is placed on the features of labour and labouring associated with the global garment assembly line. The narrative insists on the role of neoliberalism and the end of the 'labour-friendly regime' (Silver and Arrighi, 2001) in reproducing the sweatshop and exporting it across the world, thanks to the (re)rise of the powerful ideology of comparative advantage and its reification of working poverty as 'good' for development (Bremen, 1995). It also critically anchors the emergence and reproduction of the global sweatshop to the rise of processes of labour informalization entailing processes of both formal and real subsumption of labour (Banaji, 2003, 2010) and currently generating multiple classes of labour (Bernstein, 2007) whose subjugation to the capitalist logic banks on and is mediated by multiple social divides (Silver, 2003; Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2001) and is linked to realms of social reproduction (Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004, 2012). In India, the continuous presence of a huge reserve army of informal and informalized workers (NCEUS, 2007; Kannan, 2008; Srivastava, 2012;