

## **Ethical challenges of textile crafts and apparel industry**

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### **Abstract**

A new globalized context, new technologies, and dynamic social behaviors have been quickly changing the fashion markets. In this new environment, current impacts and challenges of the apparel industry are aligned with the challenges of contemporary Brazilian craft production. Under these circumstances, consumers tend to take on the role of transforming agents, strengthening fair and responsible production chains and reducing negative ones.

The aim of this work is 1. to examine the challenges of Brazilian textile craftwork and its relationship with the apparel industry in Brazil and abroad, 2. taking a closer look at the impact of new technologies related to the embroideries.

Its intent is to probe issues that arose based on the work carried out by the Rocinha Cooperative's craftswomen over 34 years. The author created the COOPA-ROCA in the 80's with the establishment of the craftwork cooperative *Cooperativa de Trabalho Artesanal e de Costura da Rocinha Ltda.* The results show that diverse and opposite worlds can be complementary; however, the challenges are great and demand new attitudes throughout the supply chain.

Finally, intend to expand the concept regarding conscious consumerism.

### **Key words**

Traditional textile craftwork, apparel industry, memory, ethics, conscious consumerism

### **Article classification**

Viewpoint

## 1. Introduction

With the turn of the century, fashion events have burgeoned all around the world, and Paris is no longer the center of attention. London, Ethiopia, New Delhi, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and several other cities spread across the world have produced their own fashion weeks, targeting one of the largest and most promising markets, the dynamic and seductive fashion world. A new globalized context, new technologies, and dynamic social behaviors have been quickly changing the fashion markets. With the internet and modern communication media, small labels started gaining access to a global audience. The result is that Western fashion has lost its supremacy. New companies from all corners of the world developed their fashion identity using their own roots, craftwork and culture. “It is fascinating to see the trends present around the world, each one mixed with unique local elements”. (Teunissen, 2006).

After “haut couture”, “ready-to-wear”, and “outsourcing”, over the last years sustainability has become an influential aspect in the fashion industry. New trends surface, such as “Eco Fashion” (Brown, 2010), with an emphasis on production with sustainable material, such as bamboo viscose, cotton blends, soy and hemp blends, as well as the use of eco-friendly dyes, among others. However, Teunissen (2011) indicates that the challenges are much more complex when considering the entire production chain from textile to apparel. In that context, the impacts of the distribution and disposal of textile cannot be ignored. This dilemma pushes for considerable changes in the fashion system in order to consolidate sustainable and effective process.

Clothes have become disposable and consumers aren't interested in, or rather have alienated themselves from the consequences of this system in the lives of people involved in the production of their products, nor do they know the impact it has in the environment. Stallybrass (1998) proposes an instigating question with “what have we done with things to devote them this complete disdain?” The apparel industry massively standardized processes and globalized markets, generating precarious and very unequal working conditions. According to the C&A Foundation (2016), most people involved in the production chain are women from underdeveloped or developing countries. “People use things without consciousness of the processes of production”... “Accessibility to ready made products works like magic. It seems as if things were produced out of the blue. As magic, this easy accessibility gives people the illusion of freedom and power.” (Frascara, 1995).

## 2. Brazilian craftwork: past and present

According to the PAB (*Programa do Artesanato Brasileiro* – Brazilian Craftwork Program),

“craftwork includes all production resulting from the transformation of raw materials, with a prevalence of manual transformation, by an individual who completely masters one or more techniques, combining creativity, skill, and cultural value (*having a symbolic value and cultural identity*), and the process of that activity may be limitedly aided by machines, tools, artifacts, and devices.” (MDIC – Ministry of Development, Industry, and Foreign Trade)

A look into the past shows that Brazil’s colonial legacy accentuated the depreciation of manual works and that, unlike in European countries, design moved away from the craftwork tradition.

“The legacy of our artifacts – in a long history that preceded and followed the arrival of the Portuguese and the subsequent migration flows from several European countries – was completely disregarded and depreciated. The deliberate desire of abolishing the hand-made object in favor of a machine-made one followed the view that the handwork tradition belonged to a past of backwardness, underdevelopment and poverty, which the promising future provided by machines would have us overcome. In the name of progress and the desired insertion of Brazil in the family of developed nations, it was best to bury these empirical practices and replace them with the New, with a capital N, redemption brought on by a future based on purely rational principles – Science, Technique, and Methodology.” (BORGES, 2011)

Despite the depreciation of manual work in Brazil, over the last decades there has been a revitalizing process of Brazilian craft products. Brazilian journalist and curator Adelia Borges maintains the importance of the relationship between designers and artisans, even taking into account the existing problems and risks. (Borges, 2011). She states that “... in promoting the revitalizing of craftwork that is taking place in our country, the intent is to contribute to its durability and advancement and so to cooperate in improving the life of producers and users and the development of the country’s economy.”

Development institutions sponsor workshops in several Brazilian regions, held by consultant designers who, along with artisans, develop product lines based on local references. These actions generally strive to add economic and cultural value to the craft product. The objectives, occasionally attained, intend to improve production, optimize costs, promote the work and its product and make the activity sustainable. “A craftwork revitalizing trend can be noticed, accompanied by an effort to value and protect this secular art.” (Ferreira, Neves & Rodrigues, 2011).

### **3. Challenges of craftwork production and its relation to the apparel industry**

There are several public institutions and NGOs that have been working over the last years to promote Brazilian craftwork activity, regardless of the actions and results achieved. According to ArteSol (*Artesanato Solidário* – Solidary Craftwork), a public interest nongovernmental organization ([www.artesol.org.br](http://www.artesol.org.br)), “all craftwork has a cultural value, but only a few safeguard the memory of traditional knowledges that are perpetuated and renovated in the art of the craft.” Just as ArteSol, other Brazilian institutions identify different types of craftwork in Brazil: Folk Art, Craftwork, Manual Work, Industrial Craftwork/Souvenirs, Traditional Craftwork, Indigenous Craftwork, Cultural Reference Craftwork, and Conceptual Craftwork. The different categories reflect the diversity of this sector in Brazil.

In the case of textile craftwork, it is mostly produced by women needing to supplement the family budget who, since they have to stay home or lack other options, devote themselves to craftwork. Though they represent a large, traditionally skilled workforce, this potential is scattered and disorganized.

Though they are increasingly more common, craftwork revitalizing actions in Brazil are episodic and have a difficulty in handling the diversity of the problems. In 2008, the Ministry of Development, Industry, and Foreign Trade indicates that of the 24,119 artisans enrolled in the PAB (*Programa de Apoio ao Artesão* – Artisan Support Program), 42% state that marketing is the main problem they face and that only 5% sell in stores and 1% in sites.

“MDIC (Ministry of Development, Industry and Commerce) data from 2002 indicate that there are about 8.5 million artisans in Brazil (3.3 million in the Northeast), accounting for a yearly financial turnover of R\$ 28 billion, close to the automotive and the fashion industries. In 2006, according to APEX-Brasil (Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency), Brazil exported R\$ 1.41 million in craftwork, of which R\$ 847 thousand were from the state of Minas Gerais, which leads the national rank in the sector. On the other hand, the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) in partnership with the MinC (Ministry of Culture) verified in 2001 that craftwork is the cultural sector in which situations of social exclusion prevail, with the lowest incomes, lowest levels of schooling and a high rate of informal market and economy. (FREEMAN, 2011)

The author alerts: “in view of this scenario, cultural management must function hand in hand with social management, and caution, so as not to fall into the traps of ‘assistencialism’ (social handouts) and even authoritarianism, is still vital.” (Freeman, 2011)

The data described above reveals that impacts and challenges of Brazilian craft production are aligned with the current challenges of the apparel industry, that includes social challenges are complex and manifold. Though it is one of the oldest industries in the world and has a

huge economic importance for several countries due to its scale of production and global market, the system generates questionable labor conditions, contributing to a cycle of poverty and environmental degradation: according to the C&A Foundation (2016), “the sector lacks a collective vision to achieve large-scale sustainability and build a prosperous future for people and for the planet.” The report developed from a survey made by Ashoka demonstrates that the apparel industry is seeking new socially and environmentally responsible opportunities (C&A Foundation, 2016)..

Teunissen (2011) keeps an eye on the present and another on the future when she stresses that “there is great pressure on the fashion phenomenon as we know it today and on the way the apparel and textile industries currently work. Under the influence of an increasing need for a more sustainable fashion, on the one hand, and technological development, on the other, fashion is changing irrevocably.” The author challenges: “how to build new values and paths to generate results and improve business models in fashion?”

In this context, it must be understood that besides intrinsic interferences from the contemporary world, the apparel industry have intensified the vulnerability of the textile craft production. Furthermore, the interactions in a globalized world and technological innovations are growing, changing the *modus operandi* of craftwork.

#### **4. The impact of new technologies**

According to the UNESCO (1997), craft products “are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product.”

However, what is found on display today is merchandise that is mass marketed, produced by electronic machines that socialize access to a product that is reminiscent of a manufacture “the memory of which articulates codes and meanings” (Halbwachs, 1968). It is contradictory to deem such distinct production processes as resulting, generally speaking, in products perceived as equivalent.

In the early twentieth century, embroidery appeared on a sewing machine a pedal, requiring a lot of work by the embroiderer and little yield. In the 1950s, emerged the embroidery in an industrial zig-zag sewing machine, guaranteeing a higher productivity but requiring the embroiderer more skill and agility in movement and manual control of the frame. In the 1980s, electronic embroidery coupled with software was introduced, excluding direct manual collaboration from the production process and, consequently, altering the essence of what

characterizes artisanal production - the impact of technology on the production process resulted in a change in the *modus operandi*.

## 5. COOPA-ROCA

In the 1980s, when I was still a sociology student, I created COOPA-ROCA, with the foundation of Cooperativa de Trabalho Artesanal e de Costura da Rocinha Ltda., in the “favela” community of Rocinha, in Rio de Janeiro. The methods applied in the construction of this work were absolutely inductive and experimental, developed from the observation of the local potential, focusing on women.

Since then, I assumed its artistic and executive coordination, inspired by the mission to generate opportunities for the craftswomen to work from home, so that they would not be taken away from caring for their children and tending to their housework. The remuneration earned with the craftwork not only contributed to the expansion of the women’s family budget, but was also, in some cases, the family’s only source of income, as a result of either the unemployment of the spouse and children in the home, or of the difficulties faced by single and divorced mothers (Picture 1).



Picture 1

Photographic record made for the catalog of the cooperative’s first show, held in 1987, at the National Folklore Institute, of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture. During this period, the work was produced with fabric scraps, and the products sold at informal fairs.

### 5.1 Early challenges

The focus of the early stages of the work was to discover the local talents to, only then, coordinate the existing competence, albeit in a scattered, disorganized fashion. During the

first decade, the biggest challenge was to qualify the women, standardize production and create market demand.

At the beginning, the craftswomen worked with fabric scraps, small leftover industrial cuttings, which were gathered and separated by size, to enable the best possible use of the material, according to the craftwork techniques mastered by the group (Picture 2).



Picture 2

Crochet pieces produced with Lycra fabric cuttings; picture by Anne Deleport

The craftswomen, who were all from the Northeast region of Brazil, landed in Rio de Janeiro with their personal histories, bringing with them the cultural identity of their respective home lands, including the fabric craft techniques they learned from their families or even from their neighbors (including, crochet and embroidery). The organization of the production allowed the retrieval, reinforcement and valuation of the textile culture and tradition of those women's home lands – most of whom hailed from Ceará, one of the Brazilian States with the most diversified textile craft production.

The 1950s saw the arrival of migrants from different regions of Brazil, causing a true demographic explosion. They came to escape drought and hunger, attracted by the industrialization of the south and its labor laws, which at the time were restricted to urban areas (mainly Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo). Rocinha's community was formed in the second half of the 1900s by people from the Northeast, migrating to Rio de Janeiro for a better life (Pictures 3 and 4).



Picture 3  
Rocinha community; picture by Pedro Lobo



Picture 4  
Image of Rocinha, as seen from the cooperative's window; picture by Pedro Lobo

Over decades, the women's level of school education remained low, the majority finishing only primary school. Estimates showed that 40% of the craftswomen have already held formal jobs, mostly as housekeepers, maids and cooks. The primary reason listed by the women for leaving that kind of work was the shortage of time to care for their children, their homes and their health. This is in line with the purpose of COOPA-ROCA, since the method developed over the years prioritizes home-based work. Many women earned no income when they joined the Cooperative, dedicating their time solely to housework and to caring for their children (Picture 5).

The vision was that the activities turned the latent skills and knowledge of women into actionable assets, providing them with an alternative to the alienation and submissive contract imposed by traditional social assistance. If, on the one hand, the economic risks of management and production were taken on, on the other hand, we could guarantee autonomy and continuity to their work in a country where public institutions are transitory, often politicized and at the service of limited and misguided agendas.



Picture 5

Craftswomen at the entrance of the cooperative, Rocinha; picture by Murillo Meirelles.

## 5.2 The fashion world

In 1994, COOPA-ROCA entered the fashion world, precisely when Brazilian fashion was becoming institutionalized, seeking a unique identity, and the Brazilian consumer grew aware of socially-responsible products. The first fashion show generated publicity in important specialized magazines, such as Vogue, Elle, and Marie Claire, among others. During that period, the cooperative was working with fabric scraps, and the pieces produced were unique, considering the material available. There were no resources available, either to buy materials or for any other kind of investment. The craftswomen's payment was dependent on the retail sales, which were generally tied to the events held (Picture 6).



Picture 6

First fashion show promoted by COOPA-ROCA, held at Fundação Progresso, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1994.

The pieces were made from fabric scraps; picture by Eduardo Alonso.

From the very start, the activities prioritized the women's technical qualification and the quality of the product, by revitalizing the existing fabric craft techniques that, for decades, reproduced the same standard and consistently low quality. The dynamism of the work raised Rio de Janeiro's textile craft work to a new level. The strategic outlook of the cooperative's coordination articulated international entities and Brazilian institutions, promoting alliances and partnerships that enabled its participation in fashion shows and exhibits. The events, in turn, connected artists, designers, and companies, producing important results that impacted mainly the craftswomen's earnings and the production scale, as well as the cooperative's economic sustainability and the revitalization of fabric craft work, in addition to inspiring a number of similar initiatives throughout Brazil (pictures 7 and 8).



Picture 7 – “Mini-knot” technique, produced by popular groups in several Brazilian regions, imitating low-quality products.



Picture 8 - “Mini-knot” chair, designed by Fernando Jaeger for the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Retalhar show, presented by COOPA-ROCA, in 2000.

### 5.3 New challenges and businesses

Numerous events were held in sequence, such as exhibits and fashion shows, which resulted in alliances and partnerships that contributed to the promotion of the philosophy, and to the enhancement of the quality of the product and, consequently, helped diversify the businesses and provide access to more demanding markets. Designers and artists created pieces based on the craft work techniques of COOPA-ROCA and, within this process, new materials arose and the production processes associated with each craft work technique was enhanced.

In the year 2000, COOPA-ROCA entered a new phase, with the development of products out of the interaction between the two segments – COOPA-ROCA dominating the craftwork processes, while the industrial processes were carried out by the companies, designers or stylists. The production was thereafter directed by the demand of the competitive markets,

an aftereffect of the participations in numerous events held in Brazil and abroad. No inventory was formed. The new model increased the number of craftswomen (from 16 to approximately 40 in 2000), expanded the production scale, and created sustainability for the cooperative (Picture 9).



Picture 9

The REtalhar exhibit was held in three different editions, in 2000, 2002 and the latest in 2007. “Re-talhar” means “re-craft”, craft again, give new form to something. Plastic artists, designers, and stylists, from Brazil and abroad, created products based on the craftwork techniques employed by COOPA-ROCA. The result was presented at a number of different museums and cultural spaces in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Concurrently with the different editions of the REtalhar exhibit, COOPA-ROCA participated in a number of fashion shows at São Paulo Fashion Week and Fashion Rio. At some events, it presented its own fashion show, while at others it developed the craftwork used in the pieces presented by the name brands (Picture 10).

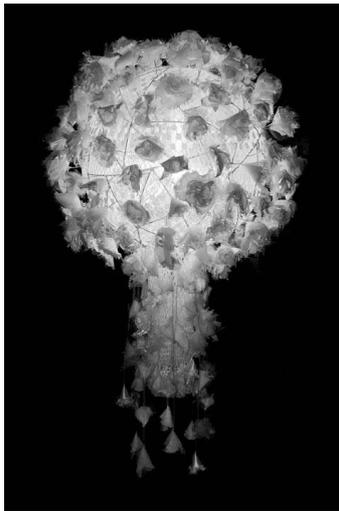


Picture 10

Embroidery developed by COOPA-ROCA for the Osklen fashion show. The quality of the work produced enabled the articulation with international entities such as the British Council, the AFAA (now named CulturesFrance), the Goethe Institute, the

Premsele Design Foundation (now named Het Nieuwe Instituut) – among others – which, in turn, produced important connections and opportunities.

Among the different initiatives developed, in 2004 the British Council invited COOPA-ROCA to participate in the event “Brazil, 40 degrees”, at Selfridges, in London. Once again, its strategic vision prioritized innovative paths, mobilizing people such as Paul Smith and Tord Boontje (Picture 11).



Picture 11

The candlestick “Come Rain Come Shine” was designed by Tord Boontje and developed by COOPA-ROCA for the exhibit “Brazil, 40 Degrees”, at Selfridges, in London, with the support of the British Council, UK, 2004. It was produced and exported between 2004 and 2015. In fact, the colored version was included in Tokyo Design Week, in 2004; picture by Pedro Lobo

Also in 2004, the Municipal Government of Paris, the AFAA (Association Française d'Action Artistique), and the Consulate General of France in Rio de Janeiro promoted the visitation of young French designers to the cooperative at Rocinha. The result was presented at the Aller-Retour//Paris-Rio Exhibit (Picture 12).



Picture 12

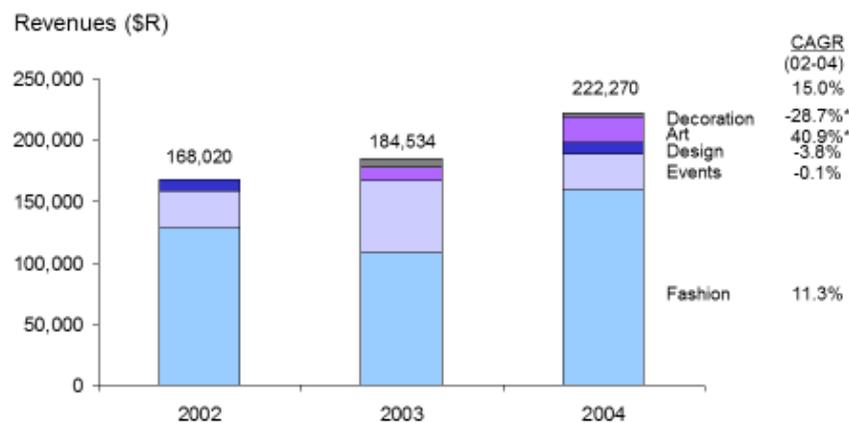
Aller-Retour//Paris-Rio Exhibit, at Ateliers de Paris, Paris, 2005, presented in November 2005 at Ateliers de Paris, in Paris. In November 2006, the exhibit was presented at Casa França Brasil, in Rio de Janeiro, during the World Cultural Forum.

Between September 2005 and January 2006 the work done with a number of Brazilian brands was presented at the Global Fashion, Local Tradition exhibit, at Centraal Museum, in Utrecht, Holland.

#### 5.4 Challenges to expansion

In 2009, the SRBC/SAIS Socially Responsible Business Club Program at Johns Hopkins University developed a Strategic Plan for COOPA-ROCA, considering the years 2002 – 2004 (graph 1). During this period, the work grew quickly (~15% per year), affording insufficient time to develop a clear product or customer strategy. The products were fashion and home décor items made with traditional Brazilian handicraft techniques.

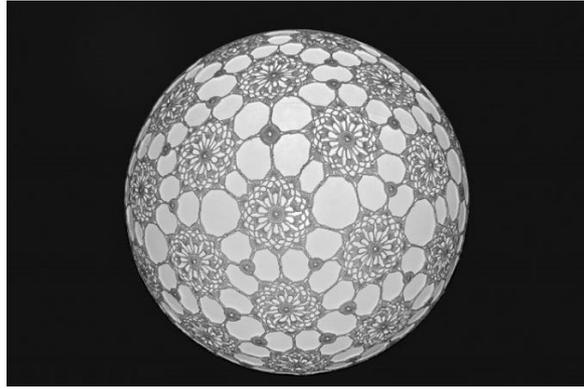
#### Overall revenues have been growing strongly



Note: \*Decoration and Art growth rates are 2003-04 (because no sales in 2002)  
 Source: Coopa-Roca

Graph 1  
 Work developed by the Socially Responsible Business Club Program at Johns Hopkins University

In 2007, the cooperative assumed all stage of production, outsourcing the modeling, cutting and industrial assembly of the pieces, at which time it began practicing prices compatible with the competing parties in the market of Rio de Janeiro. This strategy was applied to specific commercial relations manufacturing clothing. In the same year, COOPA-ROCA began producing and marketing the lighting fixtures Cristal de Luz (Picture 13). During this period, the cooperative worked with approximately 80 craftswomen.



Picture 13

The lighting fixture Cristal de Luz, which was the first product to be directly marketed by COOPA-ROCA, designed by TT Leal, won the award in the Category Unique Production Object, from A CASA Museu do Objeto Brasileiro, São Paulo, 2008; picture by Pedro Lobo

Among the many products developed and produced, in 2009 COOPA-ROCA signed a contract with Lacoste to produce the Limited Edition and the Super Limited Edition, designed by the Campana Brothers. The production enabled the cooperative to engage approximately 120 craftswomen (Picture 14).



Picture 14

Lacoste, Limited Edition and Super Limited Edition, Campana Brothers and COOPA-ROCA, 2009

Despite the substantial difficulties that it has faced, COOPA-ROCA has managed to engage over 300 craftswomen throughout the existence of the cooperative in Rocinha, it has provided the women with technical training, set quality standards for the products, and developed a good marketing strategy (Picture 15).



Picture 15

Embroidery workshop at the handiwork and sewing cooperative in Rocinha, Ltda., 2008.

In 2012, COOPA-ROCA opened a shop at Fashion Mall, a sophisticated Rio de Janeiro shopping mall, which conceded the space for the shop, while the design and assembly of the shop was sponsored by the Municipal Government of the City of Rio de Janeiro (Pictures 16 and 17).



Pictures 16 and 17

COOPA-ROCA shop at Fashion Mall

In early 2013, a consultant assessed the commercial results of the COOPA-ROCA shop, emphasizing the differentiated design and the quality of the products. The sales mix consisted of the following: clothes accounted for approximately 50% of the billing, followed by the lighting fixtures, with 25%, and accessories, with 20%. In terms of the number units sold,

clothes represented 55%, followed by female accessories, with 23%, and lighting fixtures, with 12%. The average sale price of the products was R\$ 175.00, while that the average price of the lighting fixtures was R\$ 355.00.

The consultant also listed the main competencies: high quality craftsmanship, humanized production, integrating social processes, creativity, the ability to develop original craft products, capacity for large-scale production. Finally, he listed the values: teamwork, reliability, ethics, quality, human production relations.

### **5.5. The emerging crisis**

In September 2013, the concession agreement was suspended by the shopping mall since it had sold a large area, including the space occupied by the COOPA-ROCA shop. The commercial experience was positive and it allowed the cooperative to become familiarized with the consumer profile. Although there is good potential for working with foreign clients, most of the shop's customers were Brazilians, especially Brazilian women from classes A and B+, who are conscientious consumers. The female consumers also appeared especially interested in products evoking a strong affective memory and cultural identity, in addition to their quality.

The potential would allow for a great deal more to be accomplished, on a much larger scale, but the organizational model thwarted the expansion. Because the cooperative was established in a "favela" community, it failed to procure bank financing and the investments from the private segment were hampered and, little by little, the model conceived was broken and ultimately, deeply affected. Attempts were made to resolve two complex situations that existed. On the one hand, the textile crafts market and its business environment. Despite the impositions of the market practices, such as low costs, production agility and flexibility, the cooperative's production division consistently adhered to the delivery terms and quality standards. The definition of the values often required lengthy negotiations, in the attempt to adjust the requirements of both sides, namely the company and the craft worker.

On the other hand, the social, cultural and economic conditions of the women involved with the cooperative also had a negative impact on the development of the organization. This development required virtually nonexistent competencies, such as an entrepreneur spirit, a clear vision of the business, managerial and administrative abilities, in order to complete the technical abilities that did exist. When a process of organizational development was implemented, with the establishment of an organizational framework and a more detailed explanation of the roles and responsibilities required for the management of the cooperative's

business, it became clear that the majority of the cooperative's participants did not have the profile needed to successfully conduct the business. An identity crisis then emerged among the women concerning the cooperative, which ultimately led to the suspension of its activities.

## **6. Ethical aspects to consider**

Considering the complex reality, the results are surprising and show how such vastly different worlds can be complementary. Although the logic of the private enterprise (based on profit) is largely different from the principles that guided the work at the Rocinha cooperative (which has always focused on the improvement of the women's quality of life), the results can be positive for both sides. For the *companies*, the result produces lucrative business, adds social value to the brand's image, in addition to narrowing its relationship with the consumers; for the *craftswomen*, these strategies leverage social and cultural values, in addition to having economic impact on the women's lives, as well as the lives of their families and communities. These alliances must be stimulated. However, it is crucial that the interested companies make an ethical commitment that presumes the understanding that both the challenges and the benefits must be mutual.

Different products are being offered around the globe, along with the stories and the communities involved. Designers and companies of different sizes are paying close attention to the rise in the number of conscientious consumers and the importance of the notion of sustainability in order to stand out and gain notoriety within a changing market. However, the experience at Rocinha has shown that the level of commitment is still extremely low.

“From a strategic point of view, the dissemination of a revision of use aiming at a public change in attitude, will require a recognition of the multiplicity of people, and an ethical communicational approach, where people will become active partners in the process. When dealing with responsible, intelligent, active people -- who form the group we need to approach first -- there is no hope for approaches that communicate things to people; we need to communicate with the people about things, particularly when these things require their action. This difference merits elaboration within a discussion of ethics and communication”. (FRASCARA, 1995)

This discussion is even appropriate if one considers the current challenges of embroidery. The results of electronic systems lead the look to similarity and the lay consumer does not differentiate the manual work of electronic systems.

This contradiction signals the need to differentiate the manual and the electronic. By identifying the different production processes of “*textile adornments*”, whether manual or

electronic, distinct categories are established, ranking apparently similar results. Fashion and the concept of luxury are both essentially collective processes. According to Andrade (2008), “the consumption and use of luxury items only have a reason to exist if compared to a scale in which other objects, persons and things coexist in ranked stations.” As the author states, “contemporary luxury is still a space of tradition, or of an attempt to maintain tradition.” Within that context, it should be noted that international brands may have built their empires partly by making use of the tradition and prestige of certain crafts, more specifically, of manual labor.

Clothing exists on its own; it functions as a code for both material and immaterial presences. “To think about clothes, about clothing, means to think about memories, but also about power and possessions”. (Stallybrass, 1998).

Within an ideal model, we would have to change our relationship with clothing, expand our interest in objects, cloth ourselves in more human values, acknowledge traditions that are part of the world heritage. In regards to the revitalization actions carried out in Brazil, it is important to ensure sustainability, considering the participation in production chains, in view of producing fair, responsible markets.

## **7. Conscious consumerism**

The Body Shop’s Anita Roddick was a pioneer of the idea “shop for a better world”. In the mid 70’s, she started a new business model, with a shift in the commercial paradigm. Fair trade was what drove her, from the Amazon to Nepal, from Iceland to Polynesia. (McCarthy, M., 2007). Roddick changed the way business is regarded and made consumers understand their role, revealing the impact of responsible consumerism.

Sustainability is an increasingly present topic in people’s lives, but most consumers are still unfamiliar with the production chain and what is behind each consumer choice, and not everyone strives for or can strive for alternatives in sync with their values. However, a closer look reveals a growing number of conscious consumers with buying power, who value and are faithful to products that show a socially and/or environmentally responsible production chain.

In Brazil, according to the Ministry of the Environment,

“a conscious consumer is one who, when choosing products to buy, takes into account the environment, human and animal health, fair labor relations, as well as price and brand aspects. The conscious consumer knows he/she can be a transforming agent in society through his/her consumer actions. With each consumer action, the conscious consumer strives for a balance between personal satisfaction and sustainability, maximizing

positive and minimizing negative consequences of each consumer choice, not only for him or herself, but also for social, economic and ecologic relations.” (MMA – Ministry of the Environment, 2016)

A survey from the Akatu Institute points out that Brazilian consumers are more well informed about sustainability, more interested in Entrepreneurial Social Responsibility, and more critical about companies (Akatu Institute, 2012). This is the eighth edition of their published series on “Entrepreneurial Social Responsibility – Brazilian Consumer Perception”, carried out since 2000.

“The survey portrays a Brazilian consumer who, even in an economic climate of greater consumption, remains unchanged in his/her routine behavior of conscious consumerism, who has greater interest and knowledge of sustainability and Entrepreneurial Social Responsibility, and who is more critical and demanding about company practices in those areas. The survey interviewed 800 people over 16 years old, of all social classes and from 12 state capitals and/or metropolitan areas throughout the country. Though the survey shows the number of consumers classified as “Conscious” remained stable – at about 5% of the population– there was an increase in observance of conscious consumerism practices, though only in a sporadic, discontinuous manner.” (AKATU INSTITUTE, 2012).

The study carried out by Ferreira, Neves & Rodrigues (2011) provides significant contributions to the debate regarding textile craft production. The work was based on the application of an exploratory questionnaire developed specifically to assess attitudes and perceptions of value of Portuguese consumers, addressing representations in terms of culture, tradition, design, and quality.

“Of the 107 questionnaires received and validated, data confirm the importance of gender and age as determining factors in this subject, specifically in the use of textile craftwork, the self-satisfaction with the purchase, the purchase for gifting, and the perception of the future of textile craftwork. In the examples shown, the heightened acknowledgement of their beauty and effort are emphasized.” (FERREIRA, NEVES & RODRIGUES, 2011).

According to the authors, “the fact that the respondents recognized the effort associated with textile craftwork may be an important factor to explore in communication.” The feedback of the work performed points to “strong ideas to explore in future works, namely: 1) the value perceived ad cultural heritage, 2) the concern with genuineness, and 3) the pessimistic view of the future shared by men and younger people.” (Ferreira, Neves & Rodrigues, 2011).

The study by the Portuguese authors indicates that consumers have a special relationship with the textile craft product. However, promotional actions are in general shy and the markets are often informal or even unfair.

According to a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) study (2005) carried out by 120 economists, only three countries, England, the United States, and China, produce 40% of the cultural goods traded in the world, including books, craft works, films, and CDs. The sales of these goods from Latin America and Africa, in total, don't reach 4%. It can be concluded that, though globalization offers opportunities for several countries to share their cultures, not all nations, or not most of them, can take advantage of the global opportunities presented by this globalized environment.

The globalization process of the economy promotes the homogenization of consuming standards, but, on the other hand, it also generates demands for authentic and genuine products, where their origin and history are extremely relevant. The cultural task ahead is to foster manual production in the apparel industry, promoting ethics in the production chain. These products deserve shelf space and special shelves, specifying their processes and contexts. Frascara (1995) states: "If we want people to understand the need for a revision of use, we have to engage them in activity, and make them good citizens of this revision so that they actively contribute to its development."

The consumer has a special relationship with the handmade textile product, but we must foster interest in the companies' practices, and go beyond the instantaneous opportunity afforded by merchandise. It is important to understand that each act of consumption can have the effect of transforming society, reinforcing fair, responsible production chains and decreasing the negative. It is important to value human labor and, so, contribute with the foundation of an ethical luxury category.

Once the consumer has recognized the challenges faced by craft production and the clothing industry, the conscientious consumer, allied with the responsible companies consumer has a special relationship with textile craft products, will play an important role. The process requires a new attitude, both on the part of the companies and on the part of the consumers, but the result is sure to produce considerable change in society.

The apparel industry has the potential to transform and integrate innovative views to inspire an even greater change, including changes in society in general.

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