
‘I feel like a foreign agent’: NGOs and corporate social responsibility interventions into Third World child labor

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Abstract

A field study focused on a Western-led Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) intervention into Pakistan's soccer ball industry is used to explore the dynamics surrounding local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) staff charged with implementation. Those dynamics include the post-colonial conditions pervasive in Third World contexts that frame the perception, interpretation, and reaction to Western interventions. NGO staff must navigate these conditions, which impel them into multiple subject positions and contradictory rationalities resulting in unsatisfactory experiences. Like many Western-led interventions resting on universalistic, paternalistic, de-contextualizing, and atomistic assumptions, this one brought negative unintended consequences. This leads to a suggested reconfiguration of CSR from a post-colonial perspective insistent on an inclusive ‘bottom-up’, ‘reversed engineered’ approach, wherein CSR problems are traced back to Western multinational corporations’ policies and practices.

Keywords

child labor, corporate social responsibility, development, imperialism, NGO, post-colonialism, Third World

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Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) research in management and organization studies examines business practices with respect to a wide range of issues, from sweatshop exploitation to environmental degradation. However, orthodox CSR research does so mainly within quite narrow parameters and from the perspective of economically advanced countries. It has had, until recently, little to say regarding CSR processes and projects in the Third World (TW). This is perplexing, since it is in the TW that the abuses of power of late industrial capitalism are most nakedly and routinely apparent (Greider, 1997) and where major CSR interventions on behalf of Western¹ corporations occur.

This inattention to CSR issues in the TW resonates with the lack of relevance of the dominant Western CSR discourse to those most affected in the periphery. Even when CSR-issues in the TW are addressed, they are refracted through the theoretical and ideological lenses of the West and adduced to the interests and intelligibility of Western audiences. If the CSR literature aspires to fully articulate the issues contemporarily, then it needs to engage properly with the TW where the issues are so entrenched and pronounced and from that perspective.

Recently, a literature has appeared that seems to redress this imbalance. Under the rubric 'CSR and Development', it explores the relationship between CSR and TW development, particularly regarding CSR's potential role in poverty alleviation and sustainable development (Idemudia, 2008). However, this work remains partial, underdeveloped, and has not taken into consideration how post-colonial conditions effect Western-based CSR initiatives in the TW. Moreover, it has largely ignored Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), an increasingly key institutional factor in such initiatives.

To more fully understand Western-based CSR initiatives in the TW, NGOs and the post-colonial context in which they operate must be considered. We explore this here through a field study on the world's largest hand-stitched soccer ball industrial cluster, found in Sialkot, Pakistan, where businesses and NGOs collaborated in a CSR initiative to eliminate child labor. Our objective is to illuminate how NGOs operating in Western-based CSR initiatives in the TW are imbricated in the complexities and power relations configured by post-colonial conditions that continue to prevail in such contexts. In doing so, we also explore the types of subject positions along with their, at times conflicting, discursive formations that NGO staff working in such a context find themselves enacting, and embroiled within.

We have structured our article as follows. In the next section, we describe three post-colonial conditions that constitute part of the context that NGOs engage within, implementing Western-based CSR initiatives in the TW. After this we provide an account of our field study. We first describe the context for the study, followed by a brief explanation of the methods used. Next, the field study itself is presented through which we illustrate the three local post-colonial conditions and the complexities that they create for NGOs. This becomes the basis for our discussion section where we reflect on the study findings and what it contributes to our understanding of TW CSR interventions. The complexities, misalignments, and negative consequences lead us to suggest an alternative, post-colonially-informed CSR approach. The article concludes with a summary of the contribution and suggestions for future research.

Post-colonial conditions in the Third World

The terms ‘post-colonial’ and ‘post-colonialism’ have variegated and contested usage in the literature. As a gloss we adopt Young’s (2001) account, which sees the post-colonial as a moment after colonialism considered as ‘direct-rule domination’, but also as reflecting the persistence of hegemonic economic power within imperialistic global capitalism. The post-colonial is ‘a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical facts of decolonization . . . but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into new context of economic and sometimes political domination’ (Young, 2001: 57).

The conditions of post-coloniality are those material, economic, and cultural factors that produce and reproduce that context, but which also sustain the reverberations of the colonial into the post-colonial present. ‘Post-colonialism’ is then positioned as an intellectual project aimed at understanding the dynamics of domination in the trajectory from the colonial to the post-colonial. This includes the ‘task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past’ (Gandhi, 1998: 4). Despite the recent emergence of Empire nostalgia and calls for a ‘balanced’ account of Empire and the colonial (Ferguson, 2003; Mooers, 2006; Seymour, 2008), for those in the TW, colonialism remains seared on the collective consciousness as a traumatic and catastrophic ongoing event. A response and interpretation amply documented in post-colonial theory, from the classic accounts of Cesaire, Fanon, and Nehru through to contemporary analysts, does not need repeating here. Similarly, assessments of the persistence of neo-colonialism and the military-political-economic complex that underpins it have also had adequate airing (Jack and Westwood, 2009; Westwood and Jack, 2008).

Our purpose is not to rehearse those arguments here, but rather to make it clear that this is a felt and significant legacy that continues to reverberate coloring North–South relations, especially any Western interventions into the TW. Specifically, we wish to examine how that legacy constitutes contemporary post-colonial complexities and realities in the form of politico-economic and social structures, relations, and subject positions that confront Western-based CSR interventions in TW contexts – particularly in relation to local NGOs who are charged with implementation. In what follows, we describe three post-colonial conditions that are illustrative of such complex realities.

Colonial legacy and suspicion of the West

An enduring legacy of Western colonial oppression in the TW is a deep-seated suspicion and mistrust of the West. Anti-colonial narratives explicate how Western powers achieved dominance in the TW through a mixture of hegemonic practice, guile, and force (Fanon, 1991; Memmi, 1965). Crucially, Western commercial and scientific interests were deeply implicated in that (Harding, 1996; Westwood and Jack, 2008), including trade organizations such as the Dutch and British East India companies. Such intersections of politics, trade, and military force have persisted (Westwood and Jack, 2008), as has a pervasive distrust regarding Western corporations operating in the TW, exacerbated by reports of their involvement in coups against democratically elected TW governments (Banerjee, 2008).

The implications of this deep suspicion are complex and ambiguous as far as local NGOs are concerned. When partnering with Western business interests they may be perceived as akin to ‘compradors’; formally meaning natives acting as agents of the colonizers

and with interests aligned to the colonizer rather than the local community. In the context of nationalistic sentiment and mistrust, being so perceived leads to negative, even hostile, reactions to NGOs. NGO work can also, though, be viewed as antithetical to the interests of local and foreign business interests. Further, local businesses can deflect objections raised by Western NGOs and their local affiliates about industrial practices in the TW by attributing them to some Western conspiracy hatched to undermine a TW nation by bringing its industry into disrepute. For example, when child labor was highlighted in Pakistan's carpet industry in the early 1990s, industry representatives framed the controversy as a plot hatched by foreign powers to undermine Pakistan's economy through damaging the reputation of its enterprises (Silvers, 1996). While NGOs may sometimes seek to present themselves as 'a "third way" between "authoritarian statism" and "savage market capitalism" and as at the vanguard of "civil society"' (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001: 129), they can also be perceived as part of the vanguard for Western imperialism² (Sardar, 1998). Such perceptions are reinforced by a range of other post-colonial realities.

There is the historical collective memory in the TW regarding the espousal of Western liberal values of human rights and democracy being seen as a pretext or moral camouflage for colonial penetration and occupation (Prasad, 2003). It is a memory reactivated when foreign NGOs and their local affiliates engaged in TW contexts espouse the same values (Sardar, 1998). Moreover, particularly in the Muslim TW, the invocation of such a values discourse by Western-supported local NGOs sounds hollow and hypocritical when the same discourse is used to justify, what are perceived to be, aggressive invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Seymour, 2008). Finally, suspicions about foreign-supported NGOs are compounded further when revelations surface about their engagement in questionable practices, such as working for Western powers to foment dissent and civil unrest in TW societies whose governments take an explicit anti-imperialist stance (e.g. Chavez's Venezuela) (Golinger, 2006).

The modernization imperative and its structures of inequalities and asymmetries

Another important post-colonial condition in the TW is the persistent advocacy of modernization through industrialization. Post-Second World War assessments of the West's economic, commercial, and strategic interests led to a view of the need for intensified engagement with the TW to facilitate development, particularly the newly independent states emergent from decolonization processes. An engagement deemed necessary both to serve globally expanding Western commercial interests, and as a bulwark against Soviet-led socialist expansion (Westwood and Jack, 2008). It was presumed that TW economic and social development could only proceed via industrialization processes and this was fleshed out in key texts at the time (Harbison and Myers, 1959; Kerr et al., 1962). Industrialization was held to entail a logic that took both organizations and societies down a common path leading to convergence to a (Western) model not only of management and organization, but also of societal structure, values, and governance. This industrialization thesis became entrenched in Western business and management discourse, and also in thinking about development, resulting in a single and imposed model of development. It forged associations between development, industrialization, and mod-

ernization that became inseparable as an account of progress and a prerequisite for participating in modernity.

While a few anti-colonial theorists rejected the modernization-industrialization thesis, most neo-colonial and even anti-colonial nationalist elites, of both socialist and national bourgeois stripes, embraced it (Adas, 1989; Roy, 1999). Many attributed their society's dependency on the West to a lack of industrial science and technology; precisely the things that had given the West the military and economic might to impose its will on the TW (Adas, 1989).

Industrialization and 'modernization' create massive social and ecological dislocations for TW societies, exacerbated under a neo-liberal ethos, often resulting in the erosion of state welfare social safety nets that are reinterpreted as market distortions (Stiglitz, 2003). Substituting for the welfare function vacated by TW governments, whose focus turns to establishing market friendly policies and practices, creates a rationale for NGO involvement. On the one hand, the high human and ecological costs of modernization through business-friendly reforms may lead NGOs into oppositional roles, resisting such modernization. On the other hand, the modernization imperative, with its trickle down ethos that 'normalizes' stark economic and political inequalities, endears itself to other NGO elites who, like local business elites, embark on their own internal colonization practices. Within this purview, various asymmetries and inequalities, such as inequitable pay differentials, flourish. In consequence, NGOs move away from a re-distributive, reformist, political mobilization/advocacy perspective to one of providing technical support to overseas initiated development 'projects' that do not address the underlying political and economic structural inequalities that generate poverty (Fisher, 1997). Such a context opens up significant opportunities for internal colonization. As with some local business elites, who appropriate resources through being awarded lucrative state contracts paid for by the people in the form of exorbitant taxes, so some NGO elites also appropriate the people's resources through diverting development assistance funds into inflated salaries and office perks or through the siphoning off funds and other financial irregularities (Sardar, 1998). Naturally, such behavior creates animosity among local populations.

Anti-colonial and nationalistic counter-cultural discourses

While the modernization imperative provides opportunities for local business and NGO elites, they still have to face a further post-colonial condition – an indigenous cultural revival impulse. This impulse exists in many TW contexts, fed by the belief that such traditions were damaged or eroded under colonialism. The separation of indigenous people from their own history and culture along with the diminishing of their cultural traditions and identities places profound psychic trauma upon them (Fanon, 1991; Memmi, 1965). Some local elites accepted Westernization and embraced Western values and lifestyles, alienating themselves from their own indigenous traditions. For others there was an anti-colonial reaction and a call 'for a "return to self", stressing national identity, indigenous value systems and deep-rooted cultural heritage' (Bayat, 1990: 36).

Modernizing local elites in business and NGOs have to navigate this clash of Western cultural imperialism and the anti-colonial resistance to it asserting local culture and traditions. Adopting anything Western, cultural, political, or economic can be viewed with

suspicion and antipathy. Often the local community's perception is that NGOs are working to undermine indigenous cultural revival and supporting the imposition of Western values and beliefs. Indeed, in much of the TW, NGOs have been charged with participating in cultural imperialism (Foley, 2009). For example, an NGO Bureau Inquiry report in Bangladesh found Western-backed local NGOs engaged in missionary efforts, literally speaking (NGO Bureau, 1992).

Whilst perceptions of acting as proponents of Western cultural imperialism impels some local NGOs to distance themselves from affiliations with the West and its discourses of liberal humanism or neo-liberal economics, other perceptions push NGOs in the opposite direction. Some perceive that being affiliated with Western institutions affords some protection from interference, control, or even retribution from local bodies, since any assault on Western-affiliated NGOs might incur the wrath of Western institutions – for example, the tightening of World Bank/IMF assistance. Additionally, Western affiliation gives local NGOs access to economic resources as a significant part of foreign aid assistance is distributed through NGOs (Fisher, 1997; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001). Access to such resources can strengthen local NGOs in their bargaining positions relative to other local groups, particularly state actors. Finally, being the recipient of Western patronage usually comes with strings attached. Local NGOs may end up sacrificing autonomy as Western donor pressures force them to implement projects not of their choosing and which are inappropriate to the local context (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Townsend et al., 2002).

What our discussion reveals is that certain post-colonial conditions create tremendous complexities for organizational actors involved in Western-based CSR interventions in the TW that have to be negotiated. NGOs become embroiled in multiple, complex and ambiguous subject positions, and relationship structures. Depending on context and how they position themselves, they can be hailed as society's saviors or demonized as pawns of neo-imperialism. We now seek to illustrate these contextual complexities informed by post-colonial conditions through a field study concerning a Western-based CSR initiative that took place in Sialkot, Pakistan.

Field study

Research site

The research was conducted in relation to the soccer ball production industry of the Sialkot region of Pakistan. Soccer ball production has a long history in the area and today it is the world leader responsible for 60–80 percent of the world's hand stitched soccer ball production (Khan, 2004) with leading international brands (e.g. Nike and Adidas) sourcing almost exclusively from there. The industry employs approximately 100,000 workers (Awan, 1996) across hundreds of manufacturers, but with concentration in a small number of larger producers with complex subcontracting relationships (Khan, 2004).

The cluster has been subject to intense Western based CSR initiatives involving NGOs since 1995 when the international media brought to the world's attention the industry's use of child labour³ (Khan et al., 2007). Prior to 1995, soccer balls were sent to villages where families, including children, would stitch and return the balls through a chain of

subcontractors back to the manufacturers who would export them to their Western brand customers (Husselbee, 2001).

Western outrage at the media representations of child labor resulted in collaborations between local industry, their international brand customers, and NGOs (both local and international) to constitute in 1997 the Atlanta Project, which rested on a signed agreement to eliminate child labor from the industry. In addition to child labor elimination programs, which included re-structuring of the industry, the Project also had a social protection program aimed at providing a social safety net (e.g. through microcredit) for families affected by the restructuring and an educational program for the children.

The main donors of the Project were Western-based NGOs: the ILO, Save the Children Fund UK (SCF-UK), and UNICEF working in partnership with the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI). UNICEF and SCCI provided their own funds whereas ILO and SCF-UK were conduits for funding from the US Department of Labor and the Department for International Development (UK) respectively. However, these international NGOs made extensive use of local NGOs as implementing agencies with a total of 10 Pakistani NGOs being involved.

Methods

The fieldwork for this article was part of a larger project, aspects of which have been reported elsewhere (Boje and Khan, 2009; Khan, 2004, 2007; Khan et al., 2007), the prime focus of which was the stories of the most subjugated people involved in the soccer ball industry: the stitchers, and particularly female stitchers. The bulk of the fieldwork was done between November 2000 and October 2003, during which time the first author made three extended field trips to Sialkot. There were follow-up visits in subsequent years, the last taking place on 1 April 2009.

In addition to the soccer ball stitchers and their children affected by the Atlanta Project, local NGO staff involved in the project were also research subjects. In the main part of the study, 60 interviews involving 110 people (some group interviews) were conducted: 31 NGO staff (24 male, 7 female), 64 stitchers (50 female, 14 male), and 15 people associated with manufacturing businesses. Each interview was semi-structured, lasted about 80 minutes and focused on the work, working conditions, relationships between the stitchers and the project NGOs, as well as the reactions to the Atlanta Project and its effects by the stitchers and the NGO field personnel. The first author is fluent in English and Urdu and this was adequate for communicating with NGO staff. Interviews with the stitchers were mainly conducted in their language of Punjabi with a smattering of Urdu through the aid of a translator. In addition to verbatim notes from the interviews, the first author kept extensive field notes and a fieldwork journal. As well as interviews, documents were the other main data source and were included in the contextual analysis.

Case narrative

'Dirty work' and conspiracy theories The Atlanta Project emerged as a response to an international media blitz that excoriated Sialkot's soccer ball industry for employing child labor. Many of the Sialkot soccer ball manufacturers felt their industry was placed

in jeopardy by this process. They interpreted the media campaign and the intervention as acts of politico-economic imperialism designed by malevolent Western entities to undermine Pakistan's sovereignty and economic reputation through sensationalizing and fabricating evidence of human rights abuses in its industry. This interpretation is reflected in the following headline typical for the time: 'Western Propaganda against Child Labor Doing Great Harm to Economy' (Malik, 1996: 4). This conspiracy reading was also expressed in interviews given by prominent Sialkot soccer ball manufacturers as illustrated in this quote from a senior director of one large business: 'We have seen fake pictures of tiny children stitching footballs . . . they were staged to depict the horrors of child labor and they were deliberately planted to give Pakistan a bad name' (Mir, 1996). It was a view not just held by the local business elite, but also by other employees as the following quote from a firm manager demonstrates:

Why are corporate social standards coming in? They [the West] are bonding us. They are hiring our businesses to keep [us] in their command. All bad things are reserved for us to make and then [we hear] abuse [from the West]. All materials, dirty work, sent to us. When we do it, [they] use international law and say we are damaging environment and fine us. . . . Ship breaking in South Asia. All scrap sent to third world and when pollution, give bill [to us]. They rob us with both hands.

The perception in Sialkot is that the West is out to politically dominate a developing country such as Pakistan. First 'dirty' work is sent to the developing world. Once accepted, the West imposes its corporate social standards, telling the developing country how to behave and undermining its sovereignty and autonomy as well robbing it through imposing fines for CSR noncompliance. Such perceptions overlook other examples of dirty work outsourcing where the West (in the form of multinational corporations like Halliburton) show little concern for its CSR mandates, even in extreme cases leading to deaths of TW subcontractors such as in Iraq and Afghanistan (Chatterjee, 2009).

Hostility in the field The upshot of this conspiracy talk was that manufacturers and their subcontractors roused Sialkot villagers (especially the stitchers) to be distrustful of outside organizations inquiring about child labor. Such interventions were positioned as part of a Western conspiracy to destroy the industry, robbing the villagers of their livelihoods, and weakening the country (Raasta Development Corporation [RDC], 1996). Stitchers were 'authorized' to use violence if necessary to prevent foreigners making inquiries. According to a Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) report, '[a]t one large football factory the [HRCP] team was told that the contractors has been told not to permit any one to film or make inquiries of this nature even if they had to use force' (1995: 9). Similarly, the RDC (1996: 8) reported:

A number of villagers informed the field teams that the manufacturers and/or contractors had asked them not to let anybody access information about children working in the villages and take photographs. It was learnt that two or three months previously, two foreigners had been physically assaulted and their cameras damaged by the agents of the manufacturers/contractors.

When Save the Children Fund (SCF), together with its allied local NGOs, did their first situation analysis in 1997, they reported several instances of hostility in the villages they visited (SCF, 1997).

The implementing NGO agencies quickly learned to be circumspect in approaching villagers. One way of establishing better relations with them was for the NGOs to present themselves as Pakistani development organizations and to remove the international NGO tag and their UN connections from their discussions with villagers. The international NGO and UN labels, owing to the wider post-colonial discourse on NGOs being disseminated within the community, had become associated with proselytizing Christianity or other 'Western' creeds antithetical to Islamic values. They were portrayed as a liability as illustrated in the following quotes from two social mobilizers:

At another village, when we say UN, they [villagers] say not working for our betterment. What are you doing for Palestinians? What are you doing for Iraqis?

Said I come from a *taraki idarah* [development organization]. Not saying NGO because it is viewed with negative connotations. He asked me, 'Who is funding?' [I] said, 'UN'. Then he said [that] we 'are all frauds.'

However, it was not in the interests of the NGOs to discard their international credentials completely, at times it was advantageous. Thus, the NGOs had to constantly engage in identity work, sometimes presenting themselves as foreign organizations and sometimes as local ones depending on context.

The donor Qibla (orientation) and perceived NGO excesses Being supported by foreign NGOs provided local ones with international protection, and access to resources; indeed, many local NGOs were dependent on project funding for their activities. However, such patronage came at the price of autonomy.

International donor influence was perceived by the local NGO community as pervasive and even pernicious, impacting the whole gamut of their activities. This added to the feeling that contrary to the rhetoric of grass roots participation, empowerment, and 'listening to the voices of children', this was a top-down project. Just as Mecca is the *qibla* for Muslims⁴ so, as a senior NGO executive put it, the donors are the *qibla* for the project NGOs as they are constantly turning towards the donors:

NGOs just implement project. Top down approach . . . Just turn to where the donor would like them to turn. There is a kind of donor *qibla* if you can call it.

Such perceptions of the donor-local NGO relationship were confirmed by other NGO officers.

As a result of this dependency relationship, many local NGOs were more concerned about being accommodating to donors than attending to the interests of other stakeholders such as the child stitchers and their families. Field workers often lamented this pressure that they felt led them to sacrifice the quality of services offered in order to attain donor quantitative milestones (e.g. x number of community organizations (COs)⁵

established within a time frame). As a microcredit officer observed, ‘the idea [of microcredit] is to get them [microcredit field staff] to disburse credits, the pressure to meet targets reduces the quality of COs’.

This situation took its toll on the morale of the project NGO personnel. Employees of implementing NGOs developed cynical attitudes about the motives and sincerity of the entire project and their own organizations. During interviews, many depicted the project as one giant *kagazi karawai* – an Urdu expression meaning impressive accomplishments and activities recorded on paper that are in actual fact non-existent. The view that the whole Atlanta Project was something of a sham was reinforced by other perceptions among local NGO staff, of massive resource wastage through needless overheads. Complaints such as the following were common:

[The NGOs] hide all the money they are getting in their [i.e. stitchers’] names. If everyone [stitchers] was paid what has been spent in this project, they would all be driving Pajeros . . . not to mention people in Geneva who are earning dollars on this project. For every one dollar that goes to the people, ten dollars are consumed in overheads. If we reveal the true picture, the project will be closed.

Particularly irksome to middle and lower ranking employees regarding resource wastage were the office facilities and salaries enjoyed by the executives of donor NGOs: they saw these overheads as an inappropriate diversion of resources away from the child stitchers and their families. As an NGO field worker complained:

NGO culture is like other organizations in Pakistan, a means of livelihood without doing any work. All these NGOs are mostly show and *drama bazi* [theatrics]. [The project NGOs are] paying top management large salaries, a part of which could have gone to teachers who are paid very little and do much of the real work. [There is] no need to buy [Toyota] Land Cruisers when Suzukis would do. . . . NGOs [are] created by top executives to line their pocket.

The inequality between upper management and lower level workers in the project NGO community rivaled that of the corporate sector. In our field study, the top management of education NGOs drew salaries upwards of Rs 150,000 per month, while the teachers who taught at their Non Formal Education Centres⁶ (NFE) were paid Rs 1000 per month. These perceptions of resource waste sapped the positive energies the NGO community might have had towards serving the poor.

Goal displacement and guilt The Atlanta Project’s mandate was to remove and monitor child labor and provide development assistance in the form of microcredit schemes. This became the sole imperative, and prevented local NGOs from engaging in political advocacy or interventions aimed at addressing the more general exploitation of stitchers. The stitchers faced an industrial class that not only wields considerable economic clout, but also has at its disposal a political apparatus and the law enforcement machinery of a post-colonial state. Such a privileged position enabled the Sialkot industrialists’ to establish and sustain exploitative relationships with their workers, concretized in exploitative wages (Khan et al., 2007). Attempts by stitchers to collectively organize and resist were

often met with repressive opposition. Local NGO personnel confirmed the use of physical violence involving 'goon squads' in Sialkot's soccer ball industry to keep workers from organizing.

The objective of the workers struggles was simply, but aptly, summed up by a group of female stitchers in stating that what they wanted was 'a latrine, regular work, and a good pay'. Such needs were not being met by the Project given its prime directive of removing child labor. Recognition of the mismatching of Project and stitcher priorities, witnessing the repression of labor activism as well as being unable to address labor rights themselves, led to significant demoralization among NGO field workers administering the project.

Several NGO child labor monitors, seeing the wretchedness of the stitchers' situation and not being able to do anything about it, actually exacerbated the situation by removing children from income-producing work. They reported feelings of guilt as the following quote from one illustrates: 'great success in eliminating child labor but have failed on the social aspect. We have failed to protect children'.

To cope with this guilt, some NGO personnel, like Crozier's (1964) bureaucrats, retreated into project rules in justification of their inability to actually help stitchers get better wages or more work, the most frequent demands made of them. Non-response to such demands was excused by citing the 'organizational mandate' of the child labor project that disbarred them from trespassing into labor rights and wage advocacy. They retreated to a role definition of their job as being of a technical nature not political mobilization or advocacy. In the words of one female NGO worker who used such arguments to deflect incessant stitcher demands upon her for pushing for living wages: 'I know this [is a] mundane, *non-human* basis of working, of keeping distance and *it is not nice*' [emphasis in original]. Such distancing in turn bred resentment among stitchers towards NGOs, who saw them as accomplices of foreign organizations profiteering from the packaging and selling of the misery of stitchers to Western publics, as the following quote suggests:

NGOs, what benefit have they provided us? Make a NFE [Non Formal Education Centres] and then say, 'we [NGO] will pay master's [i.e. teacher's] salary'. Next month say to us 'You pay. Six people per [school] committee. 1200 rupees [US\$20.04]. Not that much [for you stitchers]'. But what is the point of you then, if you want us to do self-help? Why are you here? You are here to earn big money. So many teams [foreign delegations] visited our NFE and they [NGOs] must have charged them much. Must have prepared big bills. Not interested in us. Just want to show to officers their work and get paid for it. Using us so they can get big rewards. . . don't think we are unaware. We know everything what is going on. All these *bharoooni idaarey* [foreign institutions] want to speak to us and raise an issue abroad to earn money. (Male stitcher, cited in Khan, 2004: 149)

In turn, NGO personnel were well aware of this village anger directed at them:

We [NGO workers] often hear this accusation from them [stitchers]. They say 'your salaries are huge, and you drive big cars and all you do is talk to us and nothing happens. Get paid for talking'. Not understand our purpose. [Female microcredit officer]

Such observations suggest that they do not feel that the stitchers understand their work or fail to see the efforts they exert for them. Nevertheless, the complaints appeared to have an impact on the NGO workers since those making such statements in interviews exhibited signs of distress and appeared to be seeking reassurances. Stitcher resentment and the perceived irrelevance of the project to their labor rights and need for a living wage reinforced the cynicism among NGO field workers about the potentially 'sham' nature of NGO work. The following sentiment sums it up: 'The most profitable business in Pakistan is NGO'.

Asserting the local: Agency with a colonial hangover Being funded by foreign sources and implementing something that was broadly seen as not helping their own citizens, the local Pakistani project NGO community worried about acting as pawns for Western powers. This crisis of loyalty was often articulated by NGO staff and is understandable when placed in historical context. Their country was, in recent history, colonized by a foreign power and controlled by a foreign organization; the East India Company. That experience and the subsequent anti-colonial struggle leading to independence is deeply entrenched in the collective Pakistani conscious and Western powers and their institutions are looked upon with great suspicion with a corresponding desire to (re-)assert local institutions and traditions.

This colonial hangover colors the perceptions of many Pakistanis, including the NGO project community, regarding Western institutions. It is further accentuated by recent geo-politics and religion. Being primarily Muslims, the NGO community finds the ongoing invasions of Muslim countries (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq) by Western governments together with their fostering and maintaining of unpopular regimes in other parts of the Muslim World (e.g. Mubarak in Egypt) further manifestations of the colonial hangover. This is compounded by the perception of Western-imposed military dictatorships in their own country (e.g. the former Zia Regime), as well as Western indifference to human rights violations in Kashmir by Indian Armed Forces. Furthermore, NGO motives and activities have received negative representations. No wonder, then, that the following quote from an NGO field worker represents a common sentiment: 'At times I feel like a foreign agent. I mean, if a donor is giving so much money, clearly he has his own hidden objectives.'

At times the sentiments were of anger, and drew upon anti-colonial discourses wherein the value of local institutions and traditions are asserted:

The West is stupid. Creating a parallel system of education [in the project]. Did not use the *madaris*⁷. That system is more compatible with our culture and society. They denied it and a new system [was] inducted. The religious school system has flaws, but why not work to remove them. It would still be better than a parallel system. The people of the poor study there. Also [they] learn good values morals there, learn not to cheat, steal, be good to neighbours. [Manager of a microcredit NGO]

Several NGO personnel were visibly perturbed at how their foreign sponsors were averse to local institutions and traditions, especially those pertaining to Islam. Thanks in part to the anti-colonial struggle for Pakistan and the accompanying rhetoric, wherein the

country is represented as a homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims, the majority of Pakistanis affirm Shariah (Islamic Law) and consider that it should be the sole legal and moral framework for their society (Davis and Robinson, 2006). Many NGO interviewees subscribed to such a view. Whilst local NGO workers wished to assert Islamic understandings in their organizational practices, they had few illusions that Western donors would be sympathetic. As a local NGO manager put it: 'for example, if we put a girl with a *niqab* or *hijab*⁸ on brochure covers dealing with our women's education programs, for sure the donors will be offended and funding will be stopped'.

NGO staff experiencing the colonial hangover responded variously, some with quiet resignation, others with anger. Occasionally the anger went beyond rhetoric and was translated into practice creating agency, albeit subtle in form. Staff were galvanized to act in ways that symbolized that they had not sold-out their countrymen or their religion, thereby also quelling their feelings of disloyalty. Here is an instance:

Sometimes I wonder whether we are doing things against our country, our religion. . . . So we have to do things in a roundabout way. If we have to give them [stitchers] some Islamic knowledge, then we put it as an 'Ethics' component of our education program. [Senior NGO officer]

This is a subtle form of resistance and reassertion of indigenous values. Such instances of resistance were neither large nor frequent, but are significant in the context of the power dynamics of the project and certainly significant for the NGO officers and their sense of self and self-worth in the face of conflicted loyalties within the post-colonial complexities described here.

Discussion: Towards an alternative post-colonial CSR approach

Our field study reveals that local NGO staff charged with implementing a Western-derived CSR intervention, as they often are, operate within a set of complex post-colonial conditions that entail them having to work through multiple subject positions and sometimes conflicting rationalities. For example, they are working for and representing international NGOs and being asked to implement a particular solution to a CSR problem – in this field study the elimination of child labor from the soccer ball industry. However, they are also part of the local community with a sense-making frame that includes an awareness of the post-colonial conditions noted earlier. They are cognizant of, and perhaps share, the suspicions of Western interventions and the promulgated modes of modernization within the local community. The intervention is not addressing the needs of local people for a living income and poverty alleviation, and local values and traditions that could be part of the solution, are being ignored and diminished.

Whilst the Atlanta Project was celebrated in certain official domains as a success (e.g. the US Presidency), this was according to Western evaluations of the narrowly-defined Western-set goal of eliminating child labor (Clinton, 1999). Indeed, by 2003, the ILO had declared over 95 percent of all soccer ball production from the cluster was child labor free (IMAC, 2003). However, although the industry had become mostly child labor free, the household incomes of the former stitcher families had plummeted (for details on the child labor elimination efforts and their effects on soccer ball stitching households,

particularly on women who refused to work in monitorable stitching centers as compared to their homes, see Khan et al., 2007). Such losses were not offset by the social protection programs for most of the families involved. The local community, including local NGO staff, know that the core problems of poverty and inequality, and of an inability to secure employment that delivers a livable wage, have not been addressed and have in fact, in many respects been exacerbated. In this sense, the CSR intervention cannot be said to have made a contribution to the alleviation of poverty or to other primary developmental goals within Pakistan.

The field study thus confirms the ‘false development promise of CSR’ and that most of the claims about the positive effects of CSR on TW development are unsubstantiated (Blowfield, 2007; Frynas, 2005, 2008). We would argue that the promise will remain false and such interventions will continue to miss their mark if TW CSR continues to be thought of and practiced in the way that it is: ethnocentrically conceived and executed, disengaged from the realities of local context, atomistic, and de-contextualized. In what follows we identify why this is so and gesture towards an alternative post-colonial re-conceptualization of CSR, while recognizing that how precisely such a transformation is to come about is beyond the scope of this article.

Third World audience and authorship for CSR

It might be anticipated that at this point we would address Western elite policy making audiences with our study’s implications in terms of an alternative CSR approach as is typical of the CSR and development literatures, even the critical ones. Since we are interested in gesturing towards a post-colonial CSR approach, informed by our post-colonial sensitivities and the post-colonial experiences of our field study, we resist that trajectory. To do so simply invites, once again, a Western-derived CSR perspective leading to Western-initiated interventions catering to Western audiences, providing Western solutions and their evaluation, and ultimately serving Western interests. Simply tinkering with and refining the CSR protocols, policies, and practices of Western companies and agencies is not going to be adequately transformative such that it becomes more than just a slave to Western conscience, a component in the value calculations of Western corporations, or an element in corporate or political public relations.

As has been noted, current CSR approaches regarding the TW, especially codes of conduct, are made in the West and exported to the rest (Lund-Thomsen, 2008). There is an inherent ethnocentrism to much CSR as well as a thinly disguised self-interest masquerading as universal benevolence (Banerjee, 2008). It purports to offer a universalistic ethic, whilst in fact resting upon localized Western specificities of history, culture, politics, and ethics.

In our field study, the whole analysis, development of plans, and solutions are Western-led and input from the TW is restricted to local business and other elites, who are often themselves participants in Western neo-colonial projects such as modernization through neo-liberal models of development. What is missing is the voice of local people, particularly those at the grassroots levels who are the supposed target of CSR interventions.

Based on our field study analysis, what we call for as a step towards a reconfigured CSR is a practice that is more inclusive giving voice to those in the local context that are

embroiled in the implementation of CSR inventions or are its intended recipients. We make such a call not simply from a moral position, one premised on the need to dismantle the paternalistic, master-slave relationships that still color centre-periphery relations – although it is that – but also from a pragmatic position since only the locally embedded really have the in-depth understanding of local contexts to be able to unpick the complexities and to anticipate the ramifications of attempted interventions.

A CSR approach genuinely focused on local development needs to be much more grounded in the relevancies, values, interests, knowledge, and cultural resources of local indigenous communities. For instance, it might explore Buddhism and Islam as just two prominent knowledge traditions in the TW. Local understandings and values need to be incorporated into all phases of the CSR process – the development of codes of practice, identification of ‘developmental’ goals, and the mode of implementation.

Our field work revealed an example of what a locally and indigenously informed CSR agenda might look like when female stitchers articulated a very clear set of goals and priorities: good pay, steady work, and proper sanitation. These were different priorities from the Western concerns with child labor. In fact, the issue of child labor was far less problematical for local women and their communities than it was for Western advocates, especially given that the work was part time, took place at homes in the context of families, and did not disrupt schooling. We witness a deflection from these goals and those of labor representation onto the single, measurable goal of child labor elimination. It might well be that the local women would prefer not to see their children working in this manner, but that is not the most pressing objective they envisage. They might also envisage other goals such as help from employers with expenses relating to marrying off their children as legitimate (Khawaja, 2002). A corporation being responsible for such things may appear strange in the context of Western CSR approaches, but might be a legitimate CSR and development goal under a post-colonial CSR approach.

Clearly, a post-colonial CSR approach drawing from various and disparate traditions in the TW, from Islam to Shamanism, might offend Western sensibilities regarding CSR and its presumed motives and objectives shaped, unreflexively, by the discourses of Western secular liberal humanism. A CSR agenda that valorizes latrines over child labor might be met with incomprehension, moral opprobrium, and scorn from certain quarters within the West. The temptation in the West, especially among those who wish to play the external agitators role, is to position such objectives and the views and values that give rise to them as rooted in some form of backwardness, deficiency of the civilizing impulse or, more charitably, false consciousness. Such judgments are, of course, precisely those that were part of the colonial calculus and that provided the moral high ground justifying the ‘civilizing mission’ that cloaked colonial penetration and domination. To the extent that contemporary CSR insists on its universalistic and paternalistic ‘we know best’ pretensions, then it continues to participate in a neo-colonial interventionist project. There is sometimes a case for outside advocacy, particularly when TW power inequalities engender exploitative or repressive conditions, but the presumption is fraught with danger and the mistakes and horrors attendant upon interventions so based needs to be acknowledged, not least that it was precisely such a presumption that accompanied colonialism – a fact that continues to form part of the post-colonial context for most in the TW, as our case reveals.

Our case study also provides another instance of the negativities attendant upon outside interventions. For the sake of placating Western consumer and advocacy sentiments by zeroing in on a one-point reform agenda (to eliminate child labor), an entire home economy was ravaged, throwing women off work, and plunging subsistence household incomes even further below the poverty line (Khan et al., 2007). The complexities of child labor being interwoven with other parts of the local economy (e.g. women's employment) and cultural arrangements (e.g. women preferring home based to factory based employment), not to mention the post-colonial hostilities of the local populations to outside Western interventions, were all lost to the self appointed social engineers who concocted the CSR intervention. And this is our point. It is hard to fathom how outsiders, no matter how well meaning they may be, are able to encompass such complexities, available as common knowledge to local insiders, that if not taken into account are likely to lead to poorly conceived and executed outsider interventions ushering in major changes that have net negative, and sometimes catastrophic, consequences in the indigenous community. The role of outside advocates and external interventionists needs to be limited and at least mediated by, if not led by, input from local agents and particularly from the subaltern classes.

Beyond pity and salvation: Treating the Third World with respect

As noted, Western interventionist stances are redolent with the whiff of the colonial civilizing mission, of intervening into uncivilized domains to save the native from themselves. It is a stance that continues to be enabled by orientalist practices that construct the TW Other in hierarchical binaries: TW as barbaric, backward, lacking, and morally inferior versus the West's civility, progressiveness, plenitude, and moral superiority. There is an echo of the colonial discourse of pity and salvation inherent in some mainstream CSR formulations where, as Frynas (2008) points out, there is plenty of haranguing about the horrid conditions in the TW and the need to intervene, but very little reflection on the complicity of the West in engineering these conditions. A post-colonial CSR approach, following the insights of the TW feminist scholar Abu-Lughod (2006), will go beyond pity and salvation and towards respect. When pity and salvation are put aside and with them the imperialistic tendency of treating TW populations as desperate children in need of outside moral tutelage and assistance (see also Boje and Khan, 2009), it becomes possible to treat them with respect as adult and cultured beings. If people in the TW do not agree with Western CSR priorities, as in our field study, then ignorance or false consciousness are not the only attributions. That they have different ideas about CSR, different priorities, and that they might choose different futures from those envisioned in the West, must be entertained and respected.

Turning the gaze back on the West

A post-colonial CSR approach, more radically, would explore how the stunted choices and deprived conditions the poor and marginalized see before them are in fact a product of the West's structures, practices, and processes. It would turn the gaze back on the West. Instead of the rationale and trajectory being directed at fixing problems in the TW,

a post-colonial CSR perspective takes us in the opposite direction. It focuses on fixing problems in the West that give rise to the conditions in the TW that presently get tagged as CSR problems. For example, the problem of Western consumers refusing to pay higher prices for goods that would enable better terms and conditions for TW workers, or the tightfistedness of international companies in squeezing further price reductions from their TW suppliers (Blowfield, 2004). Local manufacturers, often criticized for their socially irresponsible business practices will be seen for what, from a post-colonial perspective, they are; compradors working for Western principals who set the constraints that pushes these accomplices to squeeze their TW labor and skimp on CSR requirements. Thus, contrary to the conventional CSR discourse, which repeats the West's historical practice of gazing on the TW and spotting what it defines as deficiencies needing Western interventions (Prasad, 2003), attention will reverse, focusing on the West and the practices it engages in and the structures it produces and reproduces that create TW conditions of poverty, exploitation, and inequality. The task becomes a kind of reverse engineering, which addresses how to alter those structures and processes and transfer the value created in international supply chains back to TW workers, their families, and communities.

Our approach requires a revolution in outlook in the West and a stepping away from the gravitational pull of the West's imperial encounter with the TW and the hubris it engenders; that the West knows what is best for the rest. To accomplish this, a massive re-education is required centred on learning to overcome what Blaut (1993) calls 'a colonizer's model of the world' that justifies, normalizes, and makes self-evident the right of the West to intervene in the TW.

Conclusion

Our study reveals the complexities engendered by post-colonial conditions that Western-led CSR interventions encounter in TW contexts. These conditions include *inter alia* the suspicion directed at any mode of foreign intervention, the problematic nature of the drive for modernization read as Westernization, and the need to reassert local cultural values and traditions in the face of Western effacements and marginalization. These complexities are part of a dense context that remains largely opaque to Western eyes, leading to interventions that are misaligned with local needs and realities and which often bring negative unintended consequences as in our field study. They also constitute a frame through which local people perceive, and make sense of, Western interventions such as the CSR intervention into the Sialkot soccer ball industry.

In analyzing the complex and dynamic context confronting NGOs in implementing Western-led CSR interventions into the TW, we have addressed certain gaps in the literature. As noted, most mainstream CSR literature is concerned with Western corporations and the impact of CSR policies and interventions for those businesses. The more recent emergence of a literature examining the role of CSR in TW development has itself been subject to critique and any positive effects disputed. Certainly, research examining the CSR intervention dynamics in TW contexts is limited and the tendency is to focus on the impact and outcomes to the neglect of process (Idemudia, 2009). More specifically, there has been very little attention on the dynamics surrounding NGOs in the context of TW

CSR interventions, even given the increasing recognition of the importance of this institutional actor (Lambell et al., 2008). We are not aware of any prior study that examines such dynamics from the perspective of the post-colonial conditions that instantiate and circulate through such contexts.

Our analysis reveals how persisting post-colonial conditions constitute the complexities and ‘messiness’ of confronting Western-based CSR interventions in the TW and those charged with implementing them. The neglect of these conditions means that the extant literature offers a partial and de-contextualized account. We have responded to recent calls in the mainstream literature to incorporate an understanding of specific national contexts and indigenous institutional frameworks in examinations of CSR dynamics in the developing world (e.g. Matten and Moon, 2005). Indeed, we take that a step further by identifying and analyzing *specific* aspects of national contexts impacting CSR dynamics: the post-colonial conditions pervading TW contexts, including Pakistan. Post-colonialism points to the continued reverberations of Western imperialism in the TW and how that informs local actors’ sense-making, particularly with respect to engagements with the West, such as a CSR intervention. Future research might be directed at identifying other post-colonial conditions and other aspects of national context that deepen our understanding so as to better inform practice.

Another contribution of our study is the inclusion of the voices of local actors: NGO staff, business people, and workers. Often such actors, particularly the latter, are in positions of subalternity and remain voiceless both in local political dynamics and international research. It is the sedimentation of the traumas of post-colonial conditions in the consciousness of such people that colors their phenomenal world and informs their sense-making. Any analysis failing to attend to such experiences and understandings is deficient, just as any practice that does not take them into account runs the risk of being unaligned with genuine local concerns. Future research needs to also incorporate local voices and the sense-making frameworks through which engagements with the West, and CSR interventions in particular, are made meaningful and responded to. It would be valuable to examine what post-colonial conditions inform the phenomenal world and sense-making of actors in other TW contexts.

Finally, we have reflected on the implications of our field study and analysis for CSR discourse and practice and have offered the grounds for a radical reconfiguration. The post-colonial CSR approach outlined, with its dimensions of TW authorship and audience, an orientation that goes beyond pity and salvation and towards respect for the TW, and a willingness to return the gaze back to the West, offer the grounds for a radically reconfigured CSR discourse and practice. However, adoption of such an approach requires a considerable shift in Western mindsets and perspectives – an unlearning of a colonial mindset and the re-learning and adoption of a more open engagement with the Other.

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Notes

- 1 In this article we use the terms ‘Western’ and ‘the West’ heuristically to refer primarily to the metropolitan centre largely constituted by North America, Europe, and others included in the dominant centre of the world order. We recognize this as fiction and the dangers of essentialisms, but it is a necessary device to avoid clumsiness and endless caveats.
- 2 Whilst imperialism and colonialism are often used interchangeably, it is useful, we feel, to be mindful of Young’s (2001: 16–17) distinction that, in part, sees imperialism as a concept, as an ideological impulse, and colonialism as a practice.
- 3 Workers below 14 years of age.
- 4 Mecca being the centre of devotion to which Muslims face during their five daily prayers.
- 5 A Community Organization (CO), in the context of the project, is a group of villagers comprising 16–20 members set up by a microcredit agency. Individual group members receive credit from the microcredit agency, while the group collectively is responsible for ensuring that each of its members returns their respective loans as per the credit agreement terms.
- 6 Non-Formal Education Centre (NFE) is a small school (i.e. 1–3 classrooms) established by a project NGO where 3–4 hours of instructions are provided daily to about 35 students per room to bring them up to Grade 5 level proficiency. NFE teachers are hired by the project NGOs usually from the villages where the NFEs are located and are provided with teacher training by the project NGOs.
- 7 Religious schools in Sialkot.
- 8 Clothing that cover a woman’s entire head, or entire head except for face, respectively.

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