

INTRODUCTION

Toward the Anthropology of Corporate Social Responsibility

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As corporations confront new social and environmental challenges to their operations—from concerns about labor productivity to community resistance, climate change, or saturated markets—the corporate social responsibility (CSR) movement has demonstrated a powerful capacity to offer itself up as a solution. Today, ethical initiatives—from certification and labeling schemes to cause-related marketing and inclusive business programs—are ubiquitous, circulating new regimes of accountability that aim to institute ethics and social responsibility in global business practice. Indeed, while ethics were once the province of philosophy and religion, they are increasingly insinuated into corporate capitalism as the market supplants politico-judicial and religious domains as society’s ethical arbiter. It is now the global brand—whether Coca-Cola, Nike, Wal-Mart, or L’Oréal—that serves as a guarantor of social welfare and environmental stewardship, uniting financial profit with social good in the localities in which companies operate across the globe, and giving rise to a contemporary expression of what has become known as “enlightened self-interest.”

Two decades ago James Ferguson, in making his case for an anthropology of development, wrote that the study of development had been dominated by an “ideological preoccupation with the question of whether it is considered to be a ‘good thing’ or a ‘bad thing’” (Ferguson 1994 [1990]: 14). The study of CSR has been similarly polarized, drawing supporters and critics in equal measure. While advocates extol CSR as a radical reorientation of business for the twenty-first century, heralding a new era of “humane capitalism,”¹ critics have sought to expose CSR as “a Band Aid over

deep capitalist scars” (Jones 1996: 8), a smokescreen that can be blown away to reveal an unchanging capitalist order (Sharp 2006). Yet, this normative preoccupation with whether corporations are a “good” or “bad” thing for society obscures not only the ideological fault lines along which the study of CSR has run, but also the ambivalences, contradictions and potentialities that inhere in the morality of the corporate form. How then do we make sense of the emergence of these new forms of ethical corporate capitalism, encapsulated in the discourse and practice of corporate social responsibility?

Over the past decade, as corporate social responsibility has become established as orthodoxy within the arena of both development and multinational business and enshrined within a web of standards, auditors and certifiers that make up a burgeoning ethical industry, anthropologists have begun this process of sense-making, tracing how “responsibility” is practiced in the everyday routines of organizations and differentially grounded in particular social and material realities. They have trained the ethnographic lens on CSR’s moral economy in industries around the world, including garments (De Neve 2009), soft drinks (Foster 2008), oil and gas (Shever 2008; Appel 2012; Gardner 2012; Weszkalnys 2014), mining (Rajak 2011a; Kirsch 2014a; Welker 2014), tobacco (Benson 2012), pharmaceuticals (Ecks 2008), consumer goods (Cross and Street 2009; Dolan and Roll 2013), sporting goods (Moeller 2013), and humanitarian objects (Redfield 2013; Cross 2013; Dolan and Rajak forthcoming).² In doing so, anthropologists have explored CSR from two vantage points; on the one hand focusing on the apparatus and architecture of CSR (see, for example, Garsten and Jacobsson 2007; Welker 2009; Benson and Kirsch 2010; Cross 2011; Rajak 2011a), and on the other exploring CSR’s local effects, contestations and responses, etc. (see, for example, Sawyer 2004; Kirsch 2006; De Neve 2009; Dolan and Scott 2009; Li 2010; Gardner 2012; Gilberthorpe 2013). This volume, which has grown out of a special section of *Focaal* (2011, volume 60) on “Ethnographies of corporate ethicizing,” brings the two together, tracking the production, circulation, deployment and outcomes of CSR from boardrooms to operations and back again in a variety of social, cultural, and geographical locations (Bangladesh, Cameroon, Chile, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, India, Peru, South Africa, the UK, and the USA).³

In the years since the special issue came out, the anthropological study of corporate social responsibility has expanded and developed — pushing the boundaries of enquiry to new geographies, industries, and confrontations. The goal of this larger collection is to bring together

many of the key scholars involved in that enterprise, who have been tracking the processes and outcomes of CSR ethnographically in diverse contexts across the globe. In drawing together research at the vanguard of this exciting and dynamic field, we hope that this volume will open new avenues of enquiry into the morality of the corporate form and highlight the contributions of anthropological knowledge to the contemporary social and economic transformations CSR tenders. Indeed, as more transnational corporations step in, so it seems, to fill the ethical void, as it were, left in the wake of neoliberal capitalism, there is a growing need to grapple with the myriad configurations of CSR and the expectations, contradictions and frictions the movement is generating.

The book raises several questions concerning the ethical turn of corporate capitalism, including: how does the embedding of ethics within commercial rationalities blur the boundaries between moral and market forms of exchange? In what ways do systems of ethical and environmental governance introduce new forms of management, control and discipline that alienate rather than empower? To what extent do CSR standards and protocols replace human forms of sociality with a virtual “transnational economy of inspectability” (Mutersbaugh 2005: 391)? Does corporate responsibility challenge existing patterns of inequality, or is it implicated in the reproduction of power inequalities, creating new geographies of inclusion and exclusion? Crucially, a little over a decade since CSR was heralded as a new panacea to underdevelopment at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, we ask how CSR has evolved and mutated as it navigates the fault lines between the exigencies of capital and social obligation. The book addresses these questions through ethnographic accounts of “ethical” practices in a range of transnational corporations—Anglo American, Chevron, De Beers, ExxonMobil, Barrick Gold, Newmont Mining, and Avon—revealing the local realignments and reorderings of social relations produced through the contemporary reign of corporate responsibility. The chapters in this volume subject the “win-win” claims of CSR to sustained empirical research, scrutinizing the intended and unintended outcomes of CSR in practice in a variety of settings. In doing so they go a long way toward untangling the hopes, ambivalences and contradictions of CSR—bringing its unalloyed promise of empowerment through business into sharp relief against the empirical realities of exclusionary corporate-sponsored welfare, enhanced inequality, and conflict and contestation. Crucially, a key insight that emerges collectively from the chapters is that while the benefits of CSR may genuinely

be enjoyed by some of its stakeholders (to borrow the corporate jargon), they are inevitably contingent on the inherent contradictions of a doctrine that claims social responsibility for corporations while eschewing obligation and entitlement. The promise of inclusion for some almost invariably comes at the cost of exclusion, precarity or disempowerment for others. As the ethnographic insights collected here demonstrate, this fundamental contradiction—the capacity of CSR discourse to enable corporations to simultaneously assert and displace responsibility—is manifest most clearly in the mutually involved rise of CSR and subcontracting in corporate strategy, the former claiming responsibility in the same moment that the corporation works to outsource, offshore or displace responsibility down the supply chain (a theme to which we later return).

In this introduction, we trace the emergence of CSR in broad brushstrokes, summarizing its trajectory and translations, and alignments and disjunctures, as it travels from nineteenth-century paternalism to twenty-first-century bottom billion capitalism. We suggest that far from emulating a Latourian immutable mobile, an object whose meanings and forms remain stable as they engage diverse networks and geographies (Latour 1987), CSR continually reinvents itself, as corporations mobilize new material practices, forms of affect and discursive strategies in pursuit of new markets and novel techniques for heading off new social and political challenges. However this capacity for adaptation and reinvention has meant that CSR tends to be represented as a novelty of millennial capitalism, birthed in a post-Washington consensus era. Here, we briefly trace its rise and evolution in order to contextualize and historicize the apparent ethical turn in corporate capitalism, highlighting the deeper roots and longer legacies of the corporate responsibility movement.

The shifting morphology of CSR

The contemporary wave of CSR came into focus in the 1990s as allegations of corporate malfeasance, from financial scandals to human rights abuses, swept across the US and Western Europe, airing the moral failings of business to public scrutiny. As media exposés and non-governmental organization (NGO) campaigns highlighted the sweatshop conditions, ecological disasters and human rights abuses wrought by global multinationals, many companies sought to recoup credibility and avert brand-damaging attacks by incorporating social and environmental concerns in business operations. Though

CSR is often associated with the distinct standards, protocols and principles adopted during this period, its scope is both temporally and spatially broader, situated in a lineage of efforts to “moralize” or “humanize” capitalism (Jenkins 2005; Hopkins 2007). Attempts to regulate, harness and tame corporate power have taken shape since the rise of the “modern” corporation and the antitrust movements of the late nineteenth century (Jenkins 2005): from the nineteenth-century boycotts of slave-produced sugar, the industrial paternalism of Unilever’s Port Sunlight and Cadbury’s Bourneville, and the corporate philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller (Blowfield and Frynas 2005; Carroll 2008), to the enlightened self-interest model of the 1970s, ethical audits of the 1990s, and the current emphasis on entrepreneurialism, self-empowerment, and bottom of the pyramid (BoP) business, CSR is perpetually reasserted and rewritten as it seeks to broker the uneasy relationship between market and social imperatives.

Looking back over the past century, CSR has shown a chameleon-like capacity (Gond and Moon 2011) to respond to and incorporate new ideas, embodying a shape-shifting character that finds currency in response to the particular political-economic and social currents in which it is deployed. Over the past decade CSR has shown itself to be particularly adaptable, encompassing (and mainstreaming) movements that often start out as alternative or even oppositional to the corporate world, such as fair trade, as well as drawing on new management frameworks/philosophies that promise to turn development imperatives into business opportunities, such as BoP business and cause-related marketing. Equally, as fair trade, ethical consumption, and more recently, social business movements, have been progressively mainstreamed and subject to corporate capture, they should be seen within this broad, evolving landscape of CSR; as part and parcel of the same apparatus with which corporations have monopolized and deradicalized what were once seen as alternative economic models and political movements (Shamir 2004). Indeed, rather than reframing business interests to reflect social imperatives or community needs, CSR can have the counter effect: reframing the interests of communities and government to fit the priorities of corporations.

CSR is thus best seen as protean and multiply enacted—an evolving and flexible and overlapping set of practices and discourses (as opposed to a distinct set of initiatives or principles) through which business (re)makes and asserts itself as an ethical actor, claiming to elide the frictions between principles and profit by reframing (if not

actually reinvigorating) the responsibilities, interests and priorities of the corporation. Like the corporate form itself, CSR confounds stability; it transmogrifies, mutating, dividing and recombining (Welker, Patridge and Hardin 2011: S4) through encounters with diverse configurations of actors and institutions. Through its “capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization, abstractability and movement,” CSR materializes what Ong and Collier term a “global assemblage,” circulating and taking on new meanings, artifacts and practices of capitalism as it travels through and becomes emboldened by corporations, business schools, development institutions, think tanks, social enterprises, certification bodies, and consultancy organizations (Thrift 2005 [1997]; Ong and Collier 2005: 11).

Equally, the empirical study of CSR in practice reveals how there is often little intentionality or cohesion in the dispersion of CSR practices, “no central, controlling corporate apparatus” or clear-cut rationality that directs its course (Welker n.d.: 7). It often emerges reactively rather than systematically, rolled out in fits and starts by particular actors and sets of interests. Indeed, CSR can seem as mercurial as it is coherent: corporations bait and switch in response to external pressures (for example, Shell’s turn from philanthropy toward corporate citizenship in the wake of the Brent Spar Oil Disaster (Shever 2010)) or deploy CSR programs in parallel that are disjointed, disparate or contradictory to one another, as Sydow’s chapter (this volume) evocatively shows. Even during the classic CSR period of the 1990s and early 2000s, CSR assumed a polyvalent character; on the one hand functioning as a proxy state, assuming responsibility for job provision, social welfare, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship (Welker 2014), and on the other hand functioning as a form of technocratic governance exercised through the rationalist instruments of corporate codes, global compacts, and “best practice” guidelines; a pastoral ethics of care lying side by side with the detachment of the “audit culture” (Power 1997; Strathern 2000).

When viewed over a longer historical perspective we can see how CSR has evolved from its earlier incarnation of corporate philanthropy and paternalism to a contemporary rejection of that paternalism and on toward an emphasis on promoting local enterprise, entrepreneurialism, self-empowerment and BoP business as the cornerstones of sustainable development, very much mirroring shifts in the agendas of the international development arena more broadly. Today, corporate actors are seen less as patrons and stewards than as catalysts, championing the mundane everyday workings of the market as the solution to social problems through what Roy

terms “bottom billion capitalism” (Roy 2010). Here, too, different instantiations are at play: we find the mainstreaming of fair trade regimes, underwritten by the dual promise of corporate responsibility for producers and ethical consumption for shoppers, and the mushrooming of cause-related marketing, which leverages the power of the brand to mobilize consumer-corporate-NGO “partnerships” for development ends. We also find the ascent of social enterprise and the rapid rise of the BoP concept of the poor as a profitable market, which are extending the territory of CSR through a new cadre of “enterprising” businesses and “self-reliant” entrepreneurs. All these models, however, share a guiding telos: to leverage and capitalize on the moral terrain of development, repositioning poverty, disease, hunger and so forth as a font of profit and accumulation for business (Roy 2012: 106). Here we briefly review the evolving landscape of these market-based, corporate-led social initiatives, from ethical trade and corporate efforts to “responsibilize” supply chains, to “social business” campaigns that target those at the “bottom of the pyramid” as consumers and “entrepreneurs.” All, in different ways, solicit corporate responsibility beyond the economic; all aim (or claim) to transform corporations into agents (and architects) of development. Sketching out this wider architecture of ethical economies highlights the focus and scope of this volume. For, as we highlight below, while fair trade and ethical consumption have been the subject of a significant body of ethnographic and sociological research, much less focus has been devoted to corporations as ethical agents themselves, and the practices, processes and partnerships they engage in the deployment of CSR.

The anthropology of ethical economies: An emerging field

The anthropology of fair trade and ethical consumption has drawn significant ethnographic attention in recent years (see ethnographic collections of Lyon and Moberg 2010; De Neve et al. 2008; Carrier and Luetchford 2012). Though the fair trade movement consists of both an idealist orientation toward trade justice and human solidarity and an instrumentalist focus on certification and market expansion (Jaffee 2007: 31; Dolan 2010), recent anthropological work has honed in on the latter, tracking the deepening marketization or “mainstreaming” of fair trade as the movement, birthed in opposition to the logic of capital, increasingly conforms to its logic, embracing corporate

participation as a way to ameliorate poverty among a wider swathe of producers (Barrientos and Dolan 2006:181; Raynolds 2009). Though hardly seamless, the incursion of global retail giants such as Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts, McDonalds and Sam's Clubs (Wal-Mart) (Schmelzer 2007) into the spaces of "alternative trade" marks a radical break in the ethos of the movement as corporations morph from adversaries to allies (Dolan 2010) and capture increasingly large portions of the fair trade market under the banner of their corporate responsibility to both producers and consumers.

Broadly speaking, anthropologists have tracked this process at two scales, one focusing on the "impact" of mainstreaming and how its material artifacts (standards, audits) mediate perceived benefits for producers and workers in the South; and the other focusing on the discourses and aesthetics of fair trade, exploring how the moral pact that fair trade rests upon is constituted and made meaningful for consumers. In both cases, we see long-standing anthropological themes—alienation, commoditization, and defetishization (De Neve et al. 2008)—invoked to explain the entanglements of affect and economic action entailed in fair trade's ethical economies.

The interplay between corporate brand strategy and the ethical dispositions of consumers also lies at the heart of cause-related marketing (CRM). CRM, where a company or brand aligns with a non-profit organization to realize business and societal benefits, is often held up as a form of market-savvy philanthropy—a corporate gift bestowed upon a deserving proximate cause, such as breast cancer or homelessness. In the last decade, however, CRM has morphed beyond local and national "charitable" causes into a form of "humane" capitalism, deploying branded goods such as Pampers diapers, a Product Red iPod or an Always sanitary pad as tools of global development. These initiatives, which Richey and Ponte (2011) term "Brand Aid" and others describe as "marketized philanthropy," peddle the sale of branded products to mitigate pressing social concerns like HIV/AIDS, neonatal tetanus, or girls' education, parlaying the mundane purchase of consumer goods into a political act. This theme—how corporations reformat the realm of development—is also taken up by Moeller's (2013) ethnographic study of Nike's flagship program "The Girl Effect," which portrays how women have been moved to the front line of CSR as corporations like Nike seek to extend their power and influence, simultaneously bolstering their social credentials while activating new frontiers of growth. Like fair trade and related forms of ethical consumption, CRM aligns development with consumer choice, replacing "conviction

with consumption” by tethering the moral self to the purchase of the “right” product or cause. The causes pursued are increasingly spun out of a celebrity-charity-corporate complex (Brockington 2014), an assemblage that twins the celebrification of development with corporate branding. For instance, CRM casts “A-list” celebrities like Angelina Jolie, Bono and Annie Lennox as arbiters of morality; brand ambassadors who mediate the encounter between Western consumers and those in need by mobilizing the emotion and affect of the former. Like fair trade, CRM traffics in what Tsing (2000) terms an “economy of appearances”—that is, how celebrity spectacle conjures the “possibility of economic performance” (Tsing 2000: 118), a speculation that impels ethical consumption.

Recently, CSR has undergone another paradigmatic shift as corporations seize the new terrain of “inclusive business,” “shared value,” and BoP business (Blowfield and Dolan 2014; Dolan and Johnstone-Louis this volume), each of which claims a symbiosis between social and financial value (Roy 2010). The BoP concept, in particular, has enjoyed a meteoric rise among corporations and development professionals alike, moving CSR from the margins to the mainstream of business strategy. Born from the vision of the late management scholar C. K. Prahalad (2005), the BoP model seeks to marry a corporate logic of profit maximization with development aspirations for poverty reduction by bringing the “poor” into the sphere of transnational economic circulation as consumers for low-cost goods and services, and into productive activity as entrepreneurs. Though the model holds the market sacrosanct, it also turns on an ideology of inclusion (what Roy (2010) terms “neoliberal populism”), seeking to democratize access to markets by enveloping those who have been excluded (or included on unfavorable terms) from the productive possibilities of the global economy. From transnational corporations like Danone distributing fortified food through Bangladeshi “micro-entrepreneurs” and Hewlett-Packard’s “digital brokers” delivering electronic services in Costa Rica, to social enterprises promoting low-cost health and energy solutions in East Africa (see review by Kolk, Rivera-Santos and Rufin 2014), the BoP is at the coalface of inclusive capitalism, celebrating social dividends as a natural by-product of capital accumulation (World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2005).

Though lauded in global development circles, anthropologists have explored the ambiguities BoP’s union of profit and possibility rests upon as geographies of poverty are recast as loci of unmet consumer needs (Roy 2012; Elyachar 2012; Dolan and Roll 2013). Dolan and

Roll's (2013) exposition of corporate expansion into the BoP in Africa, for example, describes how business maps and marshals the cultural and knowledge assets of the poor, converting inchoate consumers into viable markets and harnessing the affective relations of the poor as infrastructure for entrepreneurial innovation. Similarly, Cross and Street (2009) show us how Unilever's marketing of "accessible" hygiene products (soap) in India reshapes consumer habits through the regulation of everyday consumption practices, rendering the spaces at the bottom of the pyramid primed and predictable to capital.

Corporations engaging the BoP, anthropologists suggest, not only scan untapped markets, looking to capitalize on the underutilized assets of the poor; rather, they seek to convert "that knowledge as a capacity, resource or a commodity in new ways" (Cross 2014: 4; Elyachar 2005; Dolan and Roll 2013). Like other "new approaches to development," such as microcredit, which mobilize affective ties, social collectivities and the intimate domain of kin as a source of economic value (Rankin 2001; Elyachar 2005), the knowledges, cultural practices and social relations of the poor are the raw material of BoP capitalism; seedbeds for growing profit and poverty reduction. Here we see an ethic of CSR purveyed not through pastoral programs of community care but through the neoliberal motif of self-reliance as entrepreneurial futures are conjured from economic disenfranchisement. Echoing the archetypal "self-regulating," "responsible" subjects of neoliberalism (Welker 2014; Dolan and Johnstone-Louis this volume; Dolan and Rajak forthcoming), BoP initiatives cast entrepreneurs as emissaries for the corporate economy of mutuality, encasing the bodily, social and economic capital needed to animate the power of the corporation and the vision of global development. As Dolan and Rajak's (forthcoming) ethnography of Catalyst—a social enterprise that provides unemployed youth with entrepreneurial opportunities in Nairobi's slums—suggests, it is a moral mission that not only impels the transformation of the individual into an industrious entrepreneurial citizen, but charges them with the responsibility of bringing about a second order of moral transformation—that is, serving the wider societal project of "good growth," a double moral injunction for the "poor to help themselves [in order to help] the economy" (Elyachar 2002: 500; see Dolan and Rajak forthcoming).

Through all of these renditions and expressions of corporate responsibility we find continuities, as well as interruptions, as CSR strives to mediate business-society relations and mitigate the contradictions of corporate capitalism. What we see from emergent

ethnographic work in this field—from the work on resource extraction in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, or sub-Saharan Africa (Welker 2014; Kirsch 2014a; Rajak 2011a), to soft drinks, big tobacco, apparel and cosmetics (Foster 2008; De Neve 2009; Dolan 2011; Benson 2012)—is, time and again, the various ways in which corporations use the language and practice of ethics to contain and respond to different kinds of challenges and conflicts generated by their activities—from ecological/environmental crises to labor rights and local expectations of jobs; from dependency and Dutch disease to corruption and conflict over resources—and CSR’s immense flexibility to offer itself up as the solution to all of them. This points to a key dimension of CSR that this book underlines—that is, how the various mutations of CSR, from philanthropy to cause-related marketing, signal its Darwinian capacity to adapt to and exploit the unpredictability of global markets as it remakes and reproduces capitalism.

Ethnographies of CSR: An emergent field

As anthropologists have turned their attention to this emergent field of enquiry they have applied classic anthropological tropes as heuristic devices to analyze how CSR reconstitutes social relations between corporate actors and their consumers, producers, and wider “stakeholders” (to borrow from corporate jargon), and to investigate how the politics of CSR create new domains for the exercise of corporate power. At the same time, corporate discourse has appropriated anthropological concepts in a bid to “humanize” the corporate machine: it has become common to hear corporate actors describe the corporation in terms of culture, personhood, and kinship, while describing CSR in relation to notions of the gift, social contract, and even reciprocity. As described below, anthropologists of CSR have responded by interrogating ethnographically these renditions of the anthropomorphic corporate form and its claims to personhood, citizenship and family to reveal the power relations that the corporate use and abuse of these concepts engender (Kirsch 2014b; Rajak 2014; Foster 2014).

One of the most salient of such claims is the evocation of “reciprocity,” which circulates through the new corporate currency of partnership, community engagement, and shared value. Anthropologists have explored the apparent capacity of CSR to bring about a shift from combat to collaboration between the diverse constellations of actors, who are drawn into complex, multilevel

processes of production and extraction, creating novel partnerships and alliances between corporations, global NGOs, local civil society organizations, government officials, and even trade unions (Rajak 2011b). At the same time, building on the much longer history of anthropology of development, these ethnographic enquiries have set out to reveal what lies behind claims to mutuality and consensus around supposedly universal orthodoxies of sustainable development and global ethics (Sharp 2006; Garsten and Jacobsson 2007; Benson and Kirsch 2010), and the conflicting interests that can at times be masked by them (Gardner 2012). Other scholars have focused on the capacity of such corporate-community partnerships to provide new channels/vehicles for patronage, elite pacting/corruption, dependency and control (Jones 2007; Welker 2009; Rajak 2011a).

Another notable strand of analysis running through the anthropological contribution to the study of CSR concerns the corporate gift. Advocates of CSR claim it to be a radical departure from old-school industrial philanthropy—defined by its integration into core business DNA as opposed to a moral bolt-on. Yet, as the chapters in this volume underline, the practice of CSR confounds stock polarities between the corporate “gift” and economic interest; between human affect and market imperatives, and the modernist teleology on which they are based. Rajak (2009, 2011a), for example, describes how the transnational corporation (TNC) Anglo American seeks to sever its CSR programs from a legacy of philanthropic largesse and charitable “gifts” by casting corporate ethics in a new register of “social investment,” “community empowerment,” and “self-reliance.” She found, however, that the specter of the Maussian gift continued to animate Anglo’s CSR programs, sustaining corporate authority and control through long-held patterns of dependency and patronage. In the same vein, Dolan’s (2009) study of Kenyan Fairtrade flowers problematizes fair trade’s calculation of equivalence, embodied in the mantra of “equal exchange,” suggesting that fair trade tenders less an economic than a social contract that carries ideological continuities with charity and international development, thus rendering the commensurability of exchange less clear and the proximity to the Maussian gift more apparent. The gift motif has been recently picked up by Gardner (2012), who considers how in the case of Chevron the corporation’s conception of the gift clashes with a local Bangladeshi, Islamic conception of charity and gifts; by Muñoz and Burnham (this volume), who describe how ExxonMobil construes its “standards of business conduct and ethics” as a gift from multinational to local enterprise; and by Cross

(2014), whose ethnographic portrayal of industrial workers in India examines the moral, economic and political logics that motivate the “corporate gift.” Cross calls for a reimagining of these transactions beyond a corporation’s calculus of capitalist value; one that considers how giving might position “donor and recipients, their capacities and assets, in a relational way” (Cross 2014: 124). In each of these cases we see the ways the corporate gift constellates around a set of recurring conceptual tensions: between attachment and detachment (Cross, and Muñoz and Burnham this volume); connection and disconnection (Gardner this volume); patron and client (Rajak 2009); entanglement and disentanglement (Appel 2012); and intimacy and estrangement (Dolan 2009).

The tension between affect and economic action expressed in the Maussian gift also appears in the material artifacts of CSR—the ethical standards and auditing protocols that undergird CSR’s new ethical economy. Building on the work of Scott, who described how states deployed technical procedures to render human and territorial subjects more “visible,” legible, and governable, a number of ethnographic accounts show us how CSR technologies (standards, protocols, “best practice” guidelines) embed a supra-cultural ethic to govern disparate spaces and actors, drawing them into the regulatory province and moral fold of the corporation (Blowfield and Dolan 2008; M. Goodman, D. Goodman and Redclift 2010: 11; Welker 2014; De Neve this volume). CSR technologies are construed as “travelling rationalities” (Craig and Porter 2006: 120), instruments that distill the messy and unbounded social realities of the factory floor (Dunn 2005; De Neve 2009), mineshaft (Rajak 2011a), oil fields (Shever 2012; Gilberthorpe 2013) or plantations (Blowfield and Dolan 2008) into standardized and categorical forms, a process of “decoupling” (Power 1997) and disembedding (Miller 1998) that solidifies, if not deepens, hierarchical relations between CSR agents and their “beneficiaries.” Others have explored how the separations that are thus entailed unsettle the language of partnership, reciprocity and collaboration that circulates through CSR. Berlan and Dolan (2014), for example, writing of cocoa production in Ghana, describe how standards transgress and invert CSR’s relational ethic, mediating face-to-face relations between producers/consumers, suppliers/buyers and workers/management through the phenomenal form of the CSR standard. Similarly, Rajak (2011a) describes how CSR instruments serve as mechanisms of containment and exclusion, confining their moral purview to certain spaces, fields and actors and rendering “them distinct from those areas and people who

are not in its line of vision” (Rajak 2010: 567). Others (Dunn 2005; Freidberg 2007; Gilberthorpe 2013) have focused on the processes of information-gathering and surveillance, materialized and routinized in contemporary audit cultures (Strathern 2000), and how these practices lay claim to moral credentials through representations of doing good. Analyzing export production zones in India, the chapters by Cross and De Neve (this volume) point to the frictions and power asymmetries the audit and its surveillance practices produce, as the audit’s routinized exchanges of codified information become a proxy for the sociality CSR implies, a variant of Cross’s ethic of detachment (this volume). A key theme here is how CSR audits manufacture an illusion of transparency, as staged performances are choreographed and ritualized to “represent” compliance and cover-up untoward practices, generative of concealment as much as revelation (Freidberg 2007; De Neve et al. 2008; Dolan 2010). They become, to borrow from Poovey’s analysis of accounting, a “self-actualizing fiction” (Poovey 2008: 58); a performance that reproduces the conditions the audit describes.

The anthropology of CSR has also drawn traditional anthropological concerns with personhood into the realm of corporate capitalism (Mauss 1990; Strathern 1999; Kirsch and Benson 2014), exploring how CSR is woven into the corporate form through the “legal fiction” of corporate personhood, often in unexpected ways. Sawyer’s analysis of a legal suit challenging the deleterious practices and effects of Chevron Texaco’s operations in Ecuador, for example, describes how the reification of corporate personhood underscored both opposition to and defense of the transnational giant (Sawyer 2006: 34). On the one hand, ascription of human form and agency was critical to plaintiff strategies to hold Chevron-Texaco to account for environmental and health damages. On the other hand, Sawyer describes how corporate personhood was also appropriated by Chevron to contest the plaintiffs’ argument, as the company claimed that as part of a corporation headquartered in the US it bore no responsibility for the actions of employees in its Ecuadorian subsidiary. Shever (2010), in contrast, describes how Shell flexibly deployed the notion of corporate personhood to rebrand its public persona as a good citizen and CSR leader, exchanging the detachment of philanthropy for the intimacy of affect, articulated in the aptly named “Creating Bonds” program. Welker and Wood (2011), too, describe how shareholder activism, materialized in socially responsible investment (SRI), construes shareholder personhood variously, drawing on both relational and bounded notions of the self. In this volume, Foster

considers the notion of corporate personhood through the lens of long-running debates in Melanesian anthropology about the nature of personhood, to highlight just how problematic the idea of the corporate person is. Comparing corporate discourses of personhood with anthropological analyses of the Melanesian “Big Man,” as both assume a role as arbiter of debts, gifts and moral responsibility over the community or clan, Foster shows how what is at stake in both is a question of authority.

A related site of ethnographic inquiry concerns kinship. Shever’s (2012) analysis of corporate practice in the oilfields of Argentina, for example, shows us how kinship sodalities work in (and are intrinsic to) the process of oil privatization. Like Yanagisako’s (2002) ethnography of the Como silk industry, Shever is concerned with the generative power of affect; how it shapes and produces business and the economy, transgressing prescribed boundaries between “affective desires and economic goals” (Shever 2012: 19). Similarly, Gilberthorpe (2013) shows how the technologies of CSR in the oil operations of Papua New Guinea serve to objectify social relations, “abstracting them from the rules of kinship ... and exchange that ensure social and economic security.” In all cases, kinship, or kin-like relations, is shown to be a resource that is exploited by the technologies of corporate responsibility, yet leaves the targets of corporate policies weaker.

Finally, a growing field of interest extends attention beyond the enactment and assumptive logics of CSR to how workers and communities resist corporate modes of governance and control, whether contesting the coercive effects of corporate largesse or the disciplinary force of codes of conduct or corporate security apparatuses. Here, the empirical frailty of CSR’s claim to mutuality and consent becomes apparent, as purported beneficiaries challenge the surveillance, authority and inequality wrought through CSR initiatives and thus refuse the inexorability of its logic (see for example, Blowfield and Dolan 2008; De Neve 2014; Ruwanpura 2013 and 2014; Sydow, this volume; Dolan and Rajak, forthcoming).

As the brief review of the literature above illuminates, while anthropological engagement with CSR has grown over the past decade, greater attention has been paid to the local impacts and outcomes of so-called ethical economies than to the actual corporate structures that produce them. With the exception of a handful of cases (Garsten and Jacobsson 2007; Welker 2009; Benson and Kirsch 2010; Rajak 2011a), corporations, and CSR in particular, thus form part of the backdrop, rather than the direct objects of study themselves.

Corporations emerge as synonymous with global capital—part of the structure rather than agents and actors themselves—while CSR is portrayed as a reified set of global structures, principles, or frameworks, rather than a constantly evolving range of practices that corporate actors deploy in pursuit of particular goals. The authors collected in this volume aim to redress the balance—subjecting corporations, corporate actors and their various constellations of partners and panoply of tools to ethnographic scrutiny. What unites the contributions in this volume is a particular focus on the corporation as direct arbiter of social and ethical goods. This role takes many forms: from claiming a duty of care over workers, to environmental stewardship, or asserting guardianship over a particular community. What is of particular interest to us is the power and authority that corporations accrue through their assumption of these roles. The key concern running through these chapters is, then, a question of power—a classic anthropological preoccupation focused here on the various ways in which corporate power is rendered, exercised, limited or resisted through the discourse and practice of CSR. Our aim in bringing these contributions together is, therefore, to highlight how CSR works as a functional resource for corporations, responding to a broad spectrum of challenges, contradictions and even crises produced by millennial capitalism.

Aims and scope of the volume

The chapters in this collection bring new perspectives to the diverse forms of ethical corporate capitalism, engaging how ethics are defined, authorized and performed across companies, commodities, and countries. Rajak opens the account by introducing the ritualized performance of CSR in what she terms “theatres of virtue,” the cosmopolitan arenas in London in which dominant discourses of CSR are produced and authenticated as transnational corporations (TNCs) and which stake their claims to global corporate citizenship. Similarly, Kirsch interrogates another element in the production of corporate virtue: the particular power of “virtuous language” as a corporate asset. Moving from the sites of discursive construction to that of material production, Cross and De Neve explore the intersection of CSR and management regimes on the shop floors of diamond-polishing (Cross) and apparel (De Neve) factories in India, while Dolan and Johnstone-Louis describe how Avon’s organizational practices repurpose “poor” women as the instruments of ethical capitalism in the “New South

Africa.” Li and Hardin, exploring the seemingly incommensurable worlds of Chilean gold mining and wildlife conservation in the Congo Basin, draw our attention to a common theme: how regimes of power and vested interests mediate CSR’s exercise of responsibility. Across various extractive sites (Newmont’s mining concessions in Ghana and Peru, Chevron’s gas fields in Bangladesh, and the Chad-Cameroon pipeline), Sydow, Gardner, and Muñoz and Burnham show how corporations deploy CSR in pursuit of local compliance, collaboration, and consent. In each case, however, CSR produces division and disconnection as much as, if not more than, cohesion and inclusion. Finally, Foster wraps up the collection by reflecting on the relationship between CSR, corporate personhood and authority by juxtaposing classic anthropological interest in the status and role of the Melanesian “Big Man” and the power of corporations. In all of these contexts, corporations are practicing CSR and deploying ethics in different ways and to different ends, from the mundane to the ritualistic and from the discursive to the material. Thus, we see how new ethical schemes are routinized in novel management practices as well as long-standing business models (Cross, Dolan, and Johnstone-Louis), how they are instrumentalized in response to particular local or global challenges (Cross, De Neve), and how they are marketed in cosmopolitan arenas to celebrate and naturalize corporate virtue (Rajak, Kirsch). Yet across these diverse sites certain continuities in the practice and discourse of CSR emerge, a set of common themes on which these contributions reflect.

First, the chapters attend to a broad empirical concern with how companies practice responsibility, exploring what people do when they engage with ethics in organizational contexts (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007). This emphasis on “ethics” as process foregrounds the “making” and “doing” of CSR in situated contexts, shifting the focus to how moral strategies are made, mobilized and diffused through specific material and discursive practices. Several chapters address the question of how these processes of corporate ethicizing and social responsibility mold the subjects they seek to transform: whether as Avon’s army of empowered entrepreneurs (Dolan and Johnstone-Louis), or in the attempt to create a disciplined and “modern” workforce (Cross); as active participants in corporate processes of “stakeholder engagement” (Li) and local partnership (Gardner), or the right kind of NGO collaborators for corporations (Rajak, De Neve). The focus on how companies shape the targets of their ethical actions also points to another critical theme that runs through the collection. The CSR movement projects an inclusive

vision of empowerment and social responsibility through corporate investment, partnership, and market mechanisms.⁴ But in practice, as the chapters in this collection highlight, they often prove to be exclusive, privileging certain actors, agendas and interests while marginalizing others, despite a rhetorical, if not often institutional, commitment to principles of collaboration and participation. In fact, as the chapters illustrate, defining the boundaries of participation—that is, designating who is and who is not included in the moral fold of CSR—transforms not only the targets of CSR initiatives, but its agents. For example, Dolan and Johnstone-Louis show how Avon’s empowerment initiatives require participants to embody the model of the successful entrepreneur. Similarly, the chapters by Gardner and Rajak illustrate that the performance of corporate-civil society partnership (the mainstay of good corporate citizenship) often demands that NGOs and communities conform to a hegemonic conception of the “perfect partner,” one that accords with dominant corporate interests, norms, and ideologies.

A second, related concern running through the collection is the uneasy fusion between the spheres of affective ties and self-interested calculation that underlies the CSR mission to remoralize the economy. At one level, the discourse and practice of CSR draws on elements of morality and affection not usually associated with the workings of corporate capitalism, penetrating the technocratic world of mineral extraction or the supposedly pure free-market rationalism of the free-trade zone, and unsettling the accepted wisdom that such corporate spaces institutionalize asociality in its most detached form. Yet as Dolan and Johnstone-Louis’ chapter shows, the intimate world of social attachments and moral obligations drives not only Avon’s CSR agenda, but also its commercial success. From another vantage point, both Cross’s and Gardner’s chapters underline the productive work that distance, dissociation and detachment perform. Cross, for example, illuminates how diamond multinationals operate as much through disconnection as relationality, as companies are “constantly engaged in establishing the limits and endpoints to relationships in their supply chain” to sustain a foothold in global markets, whilst Gardner considers the ways detachment is constitutive of CSR itself—what she terms “disconnect development,” as Chevron’s “partnerships” with a small cadre of labor contractors works to exclude (often with inimical outcomes) the broader community. The tension between detachment and inclusion also informs Muñoz and Burnham’s analysis of subcontracting in the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, where ExxonMobil sees its industry standards as both a

technical way to smooth the functioning of modular supply chains as well as a gift to local subcontractors, who are skilled-up and professionalized through the effort of complying with them. As an ethic, detachment thus assumes both human and technical forms. On the one hand, we see how the global firm and CSR standards sustain non-binding attachments to suppliers, producers, and communities, circumscribing the boundaries of relationships in order to short-circuit obligation and dependence. CSR's claim to partnerships, stakeholder alliances and mutuality do not foreclose disconnection, but rather, as Gardner's chapter suggests, can serve as a cover for their power to disengage at any time; the back door is always open. On the other hand, in De Neve's study we witness how the contemporary modalities of ethical governance, such as standards, protocols, compacts, and auditing technologies described earlier, embody a derivative value, serving as a strategic resource through which firms deflect the risk of obligation and attachment "offshore" (Appel 2012), in effect detaching them from the sociality they purport to create.

Third, the eleven chapters engage collectively with questions concerning the interrelation of global discourse and local practice that constitutes corporate social responsibility. As a global ethical regime, the CSR movement appears as a marriage of "global" values and "local" practice, systematized in technical reporting frameworks and international corporate codes or compacts that claim to be simultaneously globally applicable and locally responsive. Yet the claim to global values is far from neutral, just as the technologies employed to embed these corporate ethics in practice are much more than just technical mechanisms. The discourse and practice of CSR attempts to standardize, categorize, measure and routinize different forms of value (economic, ethical, legal) in a supposedly "win-win" marriage of social and commercial objectives that works for all parties involved, even those with apparently conflicting interests, as the chapters in this collection show: for example, the community and the corporation (Gardner), environmental activists and mine engineers (Li), workers and managers (Cross), buyers and suppliers (De Neve), multinationals and subcontractors (Muñoz and Burnham), and a cosmetics firm and its door-to-door sellers (Dolan and Johnstone-Louis). As the collection reveals, this equation glosses over the tensions and disjunctures among the different ethical values and interests of actors drawn into the transnational networks of CSR. Companies do not simply extend universal ethics to operational localities. Rather, ethics take shape within the particularities of place

as commercial imperatives, social relations, knowledge forms, and cultural meanings, to name but a few, come together to create different “ethical formations,” or in Li’s words new “logic[s] of equivalence” that arbitrate the conflicting values inherent in CSR. This demands that researchers examine different points, intersections and levels within these processes, tracing connections (and conflicts) between local micropolitics of corporate engagement and global movements of CSR. The chapters in this collection go some way to capturing these multiple scales, from the ritualized performance of corporate citizenship in London conference suites, to business strategy devised in corporate headquarters in London, Johannesburg, or Toronto; from the routines of the factory floor in an Indian diamond-polishing factory, the gas fields of Bangladesh, or a prospective Ghanaian gold mine, to the sales conventions of an “Avon Lady” selling door to door in Soweto.

Just as the production systems of most industries operate through globally diffused webs of subcontracting, so getting a grip on what CSR does in practice requires that we track it through a complex chain of interlocking contractors and partnerships from high street consumer brand names (Avon, De Beers, Coca Cola, Gap) and global mineral and energy giants (ExxonMobil, Chevron, Newmont, and Anglo), to the local contractors recruited to lay pipelines, the small supply firms contracted to manufacture garments, or even the individual front-line “entrepreneurs” enlisted to sell cosmetics door to door. A number of the chapters in this volume set out to do just that, training the ethnographic lens precisely onto those processes of subcontracting (Cross, De Neve, Muñoz and Burnham, and Dolan and Johnstone-Louis). They explore the role of CSR in lubricating and facilitating these relations—to shed light on what De Neve terms the politics of “ethical compliance.” In the extended supply chains of the garment industry, De Neve shows us how codes of conduct, as artifacts of CSR, act not as we might expect as repositories of corporate ethics, but as conduits of power, providing Western clothing retailers with yet more leverage over their small, local suppliers. Here we see a similar set of processes at work in the diamond-polishing factories of India’s special economic zone and in the construction of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, which are the focus of the chapters by Cross and Muñoz and Burnham. They show us how, within the intricate chain of subcontracting, CSR serves to reinforce rather than challenge existing hierarchies, while affording companies a protective mechanism that paradoxically works to limit (rather than extend) their ethical liability and displace risk down the chain of contractors

to those at the bottom. As the chapters by Cross, Gardner and Muñoz and Burnham underscore, while the “soft fuzzy language of CSR” (Gardner this volume) seems to invoke connectivity and collectivity, it in fact works to render the opposite effect: corporate detachment, displacing responsibility even as it is claimed by corporations. After all, it is no coincidence that the rise of CSR has paralleled the rise of rampant subcontracting across global industry.

Ultimately, each of the chapters reflects on the mystification CSR performs; how the discourses and practices of empowerment, partnership, mutuality and so forth sideline issues of power and profit. The chapters by De Neve, Kirsch, Sydow and Rajak probe CSR’s depoliticizing effects—that is, how it sops critique by bathing the corporation in a virtuous hue that masks the pathologies of capitalism. While De Neve reveals the capacity of ethical audits to abstract labor from local politics, Sydow similarly highlights the “anti-political” effect of Newmont’s community engagement and investment apparatus as a set of uniform technologies imposed to discipline diverse localities and social contexts to corporate agendas. As with Gardner’s study of Chevron in Bangladesh, and Muñoz and Burnham’s research on the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, Sydow reveals how, while the technologies of CSR and community investment serve to depoliticize corporate action in Ghana and Peru, CSR becomes implicated in particular kinds of state violence. But, as Sydow notes, this is not always the case. Her comparative analysis of Newmont Mining’s CSR programs in Peru and Ghana reveals that CSR’s capacity to suspend politics is contingent, implicated in local resistances and agency. In Rajak’s chapter it is morality itself that acts as an “anti-politics machine,” by reframing political concerns and conflicts as moral matters amenable to apparent acts of corporate virtue. The language and performance of corporate virtue are key concerns of both Kirsch and Rajak’s contribution, which explore, in different ways, how the discourse of virtue acts as a vital corporate resource that can be adapted, instrumentalized and deployed to respond to external challenges and audiences. As these chapters stress, this language and performance of corporate virtue goes beyond rhetoric to endow corporations not with ethics, but with a source of power in relation to new social and political problems. The crucial point that these chapters collectively demonstrate is that the grammar of CSR does not operate at a merely rhetorical level, but is part of a deeper and broader set of tools (both at the level of discourse and practice) mobilized to respond to and absorb opposition, enabling them to survive and expand.

From the gas fields of Bangladesh to the mines of Papua New Guinea and the corporate boardrooms of London, the chapters by Kirsch, Gardner, Hardin and Rajak all variously demonstrate how the discourse of CSR affords corporations new currency to forge (or compel) collaboration from diverse corners, where previously we would have expected to find combatants, underlining the performativity of CSR language, as it enables corporations to shape the terms of development to their interests. In the so-called “global” arenas of CSR policymaking, Rajak shows how these alliances are forged between multinationals and international NGOs. This is reinforced by Hardin’s analysis, which reveals similar, surprising alliances between conservationists and corporations, while Gardner highlights the capacity of “partnership” discourse to claim collaborators of local leaders. Finally, it is the academy itself where Kirsch shows CSR to have gained traction to the extent that universities and mining companies claim to speak the same language. The discursive effect of these appeals to and performances of partnership is evident in the ethnographies collected here, compelling consent and marginalizing dissent, or, as Gardner puts it, “‘partnership’ does not merely look good for global shareholders, it creates compliance” (this volume) while, as the chapter by Rajak shows, helping them to gain entry into new spheres of policymaking. Strategically deployed buzzwords—partnership, sustainability, consensus—give the impression that these diverse groups with divergent values and interests, as Kirsch notes, “suddenly seem to be speaking the same language” (this volume). Indeed, as the contributions to this volume show, the power of CSR often lies precisely in its capacity to invoke ethics as a source of corporate legitimacy in a great variety of geographical and political-economic contexts, as well as across the full spectrum of industries. This is highlighted by Sydow, who uses a comparative approach to reveal the striking uniformity in the techniques deployed by Newmont in the radically different settings of an old mine in Peru and a prospective greenfield operation in Ghana. Yet, as well as Gardner, and Muñoz and Burnham show, there are limits to the power of this corporate apparatus. Their ethnographic evidence from the Chevron gas fields, Newmont mines and Chad-Cameroon pipeline reveals disjuncture, disconnection and even dissent beneath the claims to partnership.

As a whole, however, the ethnographic encounters that unfold across the various sites of inquiry in the book demonstrate the powerful ways CSR simultaneously sanitizes and fuels the production of capital. Whether through “empowering” Avon’s door-to-door

sellers (Dolan), offering employment to disenfranchised Bangladeshis (Gardner), or skilling up local enterprise in Cameroon (Muñoz and Burnham), the locus of benefit remains skewed in the interest of capital. CSR may, to quote Gardner, extend the “corporation a pass into Development World,” but the seductions of that world still pale against the imperatives of the market.

In her contribution to this collection, Fabiana Li quotes a mine engineer remarking that “few people get to see the ‘the complete picture.’” This is of course equally true of the anthropologists who attempt to capture these new ethical forms within corporations, constituted as they are by multiple social relations and transnational economic processes connecting centers at diverse points on the globe. But, while the full picture is always unattainable, this collection contributes to building a fuller understanding of the shifting, ambiguous and dynamic field of CSR and the constellation of actors, interests and agendas that are drawn into or become subject to new forms of corporate ethicizing.

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Notes

1. See, e.g., Hopkins 2007; McIntosh, Murphy, and Shah 2003; and Zadek 2001.
2. See also De Neve et al. 2008 and Garsten and Hernes 2009 for anthropological critiques of CSR discourse and practice.
3. The chapters in this book were originally prepared for the panel “Ethnographies of corporate ethicizing” organized for the Canadian Anthropological Society and American Ethnological Society Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia in May 2009.
4. Cf. the forum on De Soto’s *Mysteries of capital* in *Focaal* 41: 179–201.

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