CSR in the Global South: The Continuing Impact of Postcolonial Power and Knowledge

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Abstract Recent years have witnessed a growth in international Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) related activities. Analysis of these programmes has tended to focus upon intent and scale of ambition. Despite growing emphasis on stakeholder engagement corporate approaches are continuing to originate from northern hemisphere derived ethics, governance and standards that are being uncritically applied in the global south. By applying insights from postcolonial studies, this paper argues that CSR approaches are both reproducing colonial approaches and northern hemisphere sponsored development programmes that followed independence. Consequently, CSR programmes are based upon Northern hemisphere knowledge and are reinforcing power differentials within and between regions. The chapter concludes by tentatively proposing how to re-position CSR out of the post-colonial trajectory and towards the delivery of more sustainable improvements. To do so will require the more philanthropic approach of companies operating in the southern hemisphere (Amaeshi et al., Corporate social responsibility in Nigeria: Western mimicry or indigenous influences? 2006; Frynas, International Affairs, 81:581–598; Kuhn et al., Business and Society 54:1–44, 2015) to become more engaging, strategic and sustainable.

1 Introduction

The globalisation of products, markets and underpinning processes alongside national neo-liberalism programmes have had a huge impact upon regulation, jurisdictions and forms of business practices. Following the 1980s structural adjustment programmes, national and local social services contracted and there has been a shift in expectations concerning where responsibility lies for providing provision. Within this debate, the roles and responsibilities of largescale businesses have

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grown. Such organisations have developed and support social and environmental programmes, engage with NGOs and community networks under the rubric of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Blowfield and Frynas (2005, p. 499) explain that ‘Government, civil society and business all to some extent see CSR as a bridge connecting the arenas of business and development, and increasingly discuss CSR programmes in terms of their contribution to development’. Trans-national Corporations (TNCs) are increasingly aware of CSR related expectations to invest in education, health, skills development, housing and community development. Moreover, in parts of the southern hemisphere corporate agendas are merging with national issues surrounding security, education, infrastructure in ways which can diminish corporate risk. Jamali et al. (2017) point out that this increase has been accompanied by a concomitant rise in related books, chapters and articles. They point out a number of gaps within the literature, including inattention to SMEs which they seek to fill. In this paper it is argued that greater attention also needs to be placed upon the historical trajectories that CSR connect into in order to better understand the wider impacts of policies that extend beyond short term outputs.

These concerns are compounded by limited knowledge about the precise effectiveness of TNCs’ CSR approaches in the global south (Idemudia 2014; Vertigans et al. 2016). Certainly, the lack of established methodologies to capture effects is a considerable drawback. Despite considerable expenditure on related projects and programmes knowledge of long-term and broader impacts is patchy. These gaps can be attributed partly to uncertainty over what CSR should achieve allied to weak levels of monitoring, analysis and reporting (Idemudia 2016). And in the southern hemisphere, Jamali et al. (2015, p. 3) refer to the recent debate concerning whether ‘CSR has indeed been living up to its stated promises in the developing world’. Leaving aside the judgmental reference to the ‘developing world’, in this chapter I argue that much closer attention also needs to be placed upon ways in which organisations have assumed power to influence local economies and habitus in ways that extend beyond production and consumption. In some respects, these influences appear to have emerged unintentionally not least because of a lack of appreciation both for the contexts in which CSR programmes are being introduced and the history of the regions and preceding forms of northern hemisphere interventions. These observations share similarities with multi-disciplinary post-colonial critiques of development processes and institutions and the continuing legacy of colonialism’s inequitable relations. Helping to provide the base for this discussion, Young (2003, p. 7) argues that ‘above all, postcolonialism seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the West as well as the non-west’. The primary task for this paper is to identify how contemporary CSR approaches have been implementing historical Western power structures and knowledge into other parts of the world before considering how these processes can be overcome. Some examples are drawn from extractive industries to supplement the analysis. Although this sector is not being put forward as representative of global corporate interests, in terms of product and activities, these organisations provide a continuum with colonial interests.

At this point it is important to clarify what is meant by CSR. Finding universal agreement on the definition will not be forthcoming anytime soon with the concept
much contested (Idowu 2012). Consequently I am applying one of the most widely used definitions namely the World Bank definition that,

A company’s obligations [are] to be accountable to all of its stakeholders in all its operations and activities. Socially responsible companies consider the full scope of their impact on communities and the environment when making decisions, balancing the needs of stakeholders with their need to make a profit (cited in Doane 2005, p. 217).

The definition is underpinned by the triple bottom line of economics (profit), environment (planet) and social (people).

2 Critical Analysis of CSR’s International Approaches

Opposing views about TNC approaches to CSR are spread across the positive to negative spectrum. Spencer (2018) outlines how sustainable development discourse has been co-opted by TNCs under the banner of CSR. In so doing, the concept is considered to be integral to the private sector adopting the role of agent of development agent both in terms of economic and human development (Idemudia 2009). By comparison, Kaplan and Kinderman (2017) explain how much of CSR has been reactive to isomorphic pressures from different stakeholders and regulatory bodies. Other companies have adopted pro-active responses that aim to alter the location in support of their business interests. Hence at the business level within the global south, there is discussion about the case for CSR enhancing economic prospects while also benefitting communities in ‘win-win’ situations. For instance, within the extractive industries, community investment is increasingly connected to the award of licences with reputation from preceding contracts often a factor (Frynas 2005, Idemudia 2014, Vertigalis 2017). From the late 1990s Visser (2006) suggested that the private sector was considered well placed to improve economic, social and environmental conditions in Africa. Tan and Wang (2010), p. 373) refer to,

literature in the past [that] generally posits an optimistic projection that the global triumph of MNCs . . . will introduce a new mode of business practices to the developing countries by spreading a set of universal organizational patterns and business ethical standards.

The authors (2011: 382) go on to hope that ‘MNCs will spread the common values and beliefs fine-tuned in the industrialized world to underdeveloped world’. Tan and Wang are critical about the intentions and commitments of many MNCs. However, typical of many CSR advocates, they do not question the appropriateness at the core of the optimism, namely that through CSR mechanisms Western values should spread to the ‘developing world’. Nor is there a recognition as Blowfield and Frynas (2005) outline, that the adaptation of the concept of CSR within the West has been accompanied by the tendency to assume ‘social’ corporate values to be unique to the northern hemisphere, thereby neglecting the extremely long history in which localised social obligations have permeated other parts of the world.

Within what Bondy and Starke (2014) refer to as the ‘universal’ CSR discourse, TNCs have adopted worldwide CSR strategies into related global initiatives such as
Global Compact. The discourse is underpinned with the perception of values that transcend cultures and places the onus on TNCs to integrate global values with local pressures that often arise because of weak government engagement in the region. Moreover local histories, legalities and inequities help to shape the conditions in which CSR approaches are implemented and influence how TNC actions are interpreted. Hence TNCs can be seen to respond to different, often competing, stakeholder demands which could be incorporated within business and CSR strategies (Idemudia 2014). However Bondy and Starke (2014) and Khan and Lund-Thomsen (2011) explain how local needs and priorities often fail to be located within CSR. Cultural traditions are ignored or swept aside in the rush to implement TNC derived behaviours and policies that resemble northern hemisphere ideals. For Amaeshi et al. (2006), in Africa the CSR agenda has been more about Western mimicry rather than meaningful representation of indigenous interests. Instead of emerging from local requirements, business ethics are heavily influenced by the environments in which they are shaped and by the people who contribute. And because people who develop CSR approaches are frequently from, and work for companies based in northern hemisphere geographically based experiences and understandings shape the ways in which social and environmental programmes are devised and implemented in other parts of the world.

Alongside concerns about unintentional, inappropriate application of CSR programmes are questions over more intentional application of CSR for business means (Frynas 2010; Lompo and Trani 2013; Newell and Frynas 2007). For instance, Amaeshi et al. (2006) believe that CSR in Nigeria is practised under the guise of philanthropy as a way of addressing economic and social development. This point fits within Kaplan and Kinderman’s (2017) examination of pro-active strategies that seek to change political and social environments. In their research they explore case studies in an earlier phase of CSR, from 1960s, onwards and observe how CSR has been applied to shape government and elite policies and the opinions of affected populations.

Picking up a different strand, Guzman and Becker-Olsen (2010: 203) have argued,

Strategic CSR programmes can serve a marketing purpose. In these instances companies may choose to engage in CSR programmes as public relations opportunities, reputational insurance that will help in times of crisis, or brand building.

This quote should not infer that I am arguing that CSR as a PR exercise is necessarily problematic especially when connected within well considered, sustainable frameworks. And as Lompo and Trani (2013) observe, the fear of bad publicity is motivating corporations to adopt more socially responsible codes of practice for development. However too often projects have been ill conceived forms of philanthropy or short-term photo opportunities that fail to benefit the designated beneficiaries. In some cases, the photograph can be the last connection with the communities who do not possess the resources to deliver or resource the intended services (Idemudia 2009, 2016). This emphasis upon quick, visible outputs is part of wider approaches which are much easier to observe. Hence companies can measure
progress by the number of local residents they employ and the health facilities and schools that are built. For example, glancing through mining companies corporate brochures and reports, such as BHP Billiton, Freeport-McMoRan, Glencoe, Konkola Copper Mines (KCM), Petra Diamonds and Rio Tinto place considerable emphasis on health, school and welfare provisions. Gulbrandsen and Moe (2007) have also reported on the corporate concentration on reportable benefits and communities in areas they operate and the ‘micro-level’ directing actions.

These criticisms of Western orientated assumptions that underpin CSR share similarities with failings within modernisation theories and development studies. Portrayals of the ‘third world’ or ‘developing world’ are seen to be without history, exotic locations on which to apply western derived assumptions with little committed stakeholder engagement. The remainder of the chapter explores ways in which CSR policies and knowledge have replicated problems and power relations associated with developmental approaches. In so doing postcolonial studies will be drawn upon to highlight commonalities between CSR today and the ‘civilising mission’ of the past.

3 Locating CSR within Development and Post-Colonial Studies

Building upon the preceding points this chapter will position CSR critically through the application of concepts from postcolonial studies, drawing out salient points in historical developments that continue to have contemporary resonance.

Often positioned in the inter-disciplinary philosophical space between Marxism and Foucauldian post structuralism, postcolonialism is a concept referring to the period after the end of ‘direct rule domination’ and the persistence of what is argued to be hegemonic economic power. Gandhi (1998) and Malreddy et al. (2015) outline how Marxism has influenced commitment to the analysis of power and global inequalities while literary contributions, influenced by poststructuralism, celebrate difference, subalternity, identity and the right to belong. The different strands have often been applied in isolation from, or on occasion in opposition to, other types of postcolonial insights, thereby confounding theoretical and methodological uniformity.

Nevertheless collectively postcolonial contributions provide a range of principles and critical insights into patterns of power, knowledge, language and economics and hierarchies of social life and culture that followed independence (Gandhi 1998, Loomba 2005, Malreddy et al. 2015, Willis 2011). Gandhi (1998) explains how the postcolonial critic needs to synthesis, or negotiate between, the critique of Western epistemology and theorisation of cultural and materialist philosophies. Together postcolonial analysis provides powerful, if not necessarily coherent, insights into the inequities embedded within global processes. In Said’s (1978) seminal text Orientalism he exposed the reciprocal relation that existed between
knowledge and power within European imperialism. As Gandhi (1998, p. 25) explains postcolonialism provides ‘a very specific understanding of Western domination as the symptom of an unwholesome alliance between power and knowledge’. Consequently power and knowledge are the focal point of this chapter.

In light of the heavy emphasis on critical analysis and semantics, key concepts within postcolonial studies have aroused considerable debate. Willis (2011, p. 30) outlines how “‘post-colonialism usually used to indicate a time period after colonialism, while “postcolonialism” describes an approach to understanding social, economic, political and cultural processes’. With the former indicating a phase after colonialism, the unhyphenated application is considered to emphasise more emphatically the continuation with the colonial period and ongoing consequences. For this reason, while being conscious of multiple differences that have followed independence, postcolonialism will be applied in this paper. Material, economic and cultural arrangements alongside ideas and discourses are considered to produce and reproduce colonial components within the continuum of postcolonial power. Hence the formation of nation-states did not bring independence for the majority but continuing and revised forms of dependence. The new indigenous elite acquired the colonial system of control, army, police, law, bureaucracy and prisons and many continued to use these mechanisms for their own, or collective, ends. Moreover the newly independent country remained under the heavy influence of former colonial masters to whom they were increasingly in debt.

There has been considerable debate over the extent to which former colonies continue to be shaped by legacies of the past. Networks, bonds and interwoven flows of goods, ideas and people that were integral to European colonialism became a base for what is today described as globalisation. The pervasive, expansive movements within globalisation have led to a focus upon interconnections and commonalities of economies, identities and cultures. Divisions and the roots of their formation and continuation have disappeared within the narrative of global flows (Loomba 2005). Nevertheless, inequalities between northern and southern hemispheres remain and were initially shaped through the application of colonial economic, political and social controls. The apparent disappearance of divisions from history fits within what Gandhi (1998, p. 4) describes as ‘postcolonial amnesia’ and ‘historical reinvention’ which ‘erase painful memories of colonial subordination’. The deep rooted inequalities have contributed to ongoing northern hemisphere dominance while restraining developmental opportunities in the south. Moreover the dominance influenced perceptions both of the colonisers and the colonised.

Economic relationships that existed during colonialism continued to place the former colonies in subservient or dependent positions following political independence. Although newly formed states often sought to disown burdens of colonial inheritance and humiliations of race and racism some colonial practices were reproduced. Memmi (1968) refers to expectations surrounding independence of magical transformation which underestimate the psychological hold of the colonial past on the postcolonial present. Residue traces and memories of subordination remain. The colonial tradition ‘chained the coloniser and the colonised into an implacable dependence, moulded their respective characters and dictated their...
conduct’ (Memmi 1968, p. 45). Said (1978) has also argued that the longevity of the colonised is perpetuated through persisting colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power. To help further explain the control of individual bodies Gilroy (1994) applies the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics through work, language, regulation of education, gender and sexuality. These controls are interwoven with political, administrative, educational, religious and legal arrangements which continue both to reflect earlier European ‘civilised’ influences and shape contemporary behaviour and attitudes in the global south.

Hence while power and interdependencies have shifted across states, regions, generations and other demographics the extent to which power differentials have narrowed has been restricted. Wouters (2007: 187) explains how, shifts in power balances at times offered collective power chances to groups of relative outsiders, and these chances came to be realized and expressed in social ranking but usually not without some delay. The process of realizing collective power chances has a psychic (mental) and a social side. Individuals need to become aware of these chances and to shake off the submissiveness that the old balance of power demanded. This is not as easy as process as it may sound because this submissiveness is usually ingrained rather firmly in the personality.

Today post-colonial contributions have argued that power and influence continues to flow through different processes across inequitable international trade and relations that enable control of other countries. Seeking to address this imbalance through highlighting inequalities and injustice, postcolonial contributors also confront disparities in power relations and the transfer of knowledge that underpin the basis for self-projected superiority and imposed inferiority (Willis 2011). Therefore although lacking both a coherent theoretical stance and methodology, postcolonial critics explore empowerment of the poor and disadvantaged.

Against the backdrop of the perceived legacies of colonialism and the continuation of northern hemisphere post-independence development programmes, whether economic or judged philanthropic, have been subjected to critical analysis. For instance, international practitioners often address sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, inequality and injustice. However while perhaps possessing laudable intentions, such actions can replicate impressions of Western values, paternalism and southern hemisphere dependency. Moreover criticism that had previously been directed at earlier modernisation programmes applying Western processes to non-Western settings continues to resonate (Vertigans 2012). Escobar’s (1995, p. 45) description of development as ‘a historical construct that provides space in which poor countries are known, specified and intervened upon’ reflects many international CSR approaches.

Criticism directed towards development studies is also applicable to the activities of TNCs and the implementation of CSR programmes. Comparisons can be drawn between colonial commercial activities and how TNCs heavily influence ways of organising market institutions, appropriate land and undermine local autonomy with colonial arrangements, especially indirect rule that was more decentralised, and the maintenance of core-periphery relations (Boussebaa and Morgan 2014). Moreover, corporate power and influence connects and disproportionately helps to shape
localised administrative, political and economic arrangements. Within TNCs, Boussebaa and Morgan (2014) highlight, the division of activities between core producers of knowledge and skills and their peripheral recipients who follow instructions. As Blowfield and Frynas (2005, p. 499) explain,

one of the reasons why CSR and international development practice have moved closer together is that they share and reinforce assumptions that poverty and marginalization are fundamentally matters of geography, identity or difference rather than structural phenomena.

Consequently, what is different about the global south becomes the basis for explaining the problems. Solutions to these fundamental issues are to be developed and delivered by discrete, identifiable actors who originate from, or are instructed by, the global north. And Lauwo and Otusanya (2014) have spotted that CSR approaches tend to neglect wider socio-political, economic and historical structures and global processes which are instrumental in shaping direction and scope.

All of these critical comments should not overlook that CSR can help alleviate poverty and sustainable development (Idemudia 2009). However, Adanhounme (2011) and Khan et al. (2010) both argue that approaches are partial and underdeveloped. Alternatively corporate ambition is exaggerated to the point of disbelief, exemplified in the energy sector by Lukoil’s (2018) aim for social investment to be ‘doing great things and changing the world for the better is an integral part of our lives’ while Chevron are ‘committed to helping the Angolan people improve their health, education and livelihoods’. Typically, the corporate ambition fails to acknowledge or realise that the scale of their CSR operations is directed at achieving only limited localised impacts with no programmes implemented to deliver widespread national and global ideals. Moreover, the connection with post-colonial conditions is not considered. Hence, the fundamental problems that result in environmental degradation, poverty and declining economy are neglected in the focus upon smaller scale ‘solutions’.

Applying this critical edge to CSR suggests that there is a danger that TNCs cultivate particular values and practices that are underpinned by a sense of moral and cultural leadership within a postcolonial discourse. Idemudia (2011) points out CSR agendas have tended to reflect the priorities and concerns of the Northern hemisphere with Southern representation inadequate. The division of core and periphery or developed and developing remains albeit located within a more overtly financial framework. Understanding the basis for the division requires the history of colonial power relations and how these relations have become incorporated within international business practices to be analysed.

4 Power to the Corporate People

Within the former colonies, postcolonialist critics have argued that power structures have continued with policies shaped by the legacies from the past. Following independence the newly installed leaders reappropriated these channels across
institutional and discursive spheres to maintain power for their, and the former colonialists, ends (Mbembe 2001). Today the roles of large businesses are considered within postcolonial studies to be shaping power, material and discursive processes in many parts of the world (Malreddy et al. 2015). Levels of influence vary and the same is true for CSR connections.

The power balance between TNCs and communities are often stacked towards the former as the levels of interdependence are inequitable. Hilson (2012) explains there are variations according to location. In the northern hemisphere levels of regulation and extent of welfare provision provides the parameters for TNCs to operate. By comparison, other parts of less monitored regions with weak enforcement of law means that TNCs can be in position of self-regulation through introduction of voluntary mechanisms. Utting (2007) explores CSR as a mode of domination that enables TNCs to intervene to incorporate CSR measures that weaken opposition and regulatory demands while reinforcing their legitimacy and power.

TNC influences also stem in part from the imbalance between company and local stakeholders such as workers, communities and even governments. For instance, the structural adjustment programmes stemming from international financial transactions and constraints and imposed upon many southern hemisphere countries from the 1980s have, Adanhounme (2011) argues, provided grounds for TNCs to negotiate a post-colonial return to their considerable advantage. Moreover corporate reliance upon localised others is weak. This imbalance stems from workers lacking collective institutions to represent their interests, in part because their job related skills and knowledge can be easily replaced. Idemudia (2014) refers to the capacity of TNCs to reshape development agendas to fit with corporate interests and values. The power gap weakens regional and national governments bargaining positions. As Lauwo and Otusanya (2014) observe, ‘developing’ countries governments’ desperation to attract foreign investment can create tensions between promoting socio-economic order and protecting citizens welfare from unethical corporate behaviour.

When regulations are introduced and reforms planned, TNCs can lobby to prevent or sponsor influential opinion shapers which weaken abilities of governments to implement changes. Kaplan and Kinderman (2017, p. 40) explain how proactive CSR strategies ‘are designed to act as buffer against anti-corporate political threats and to exploit political opportunities to advance liberalization.’ In so doing the authors highlight the connection between CSR and high level power relations. Conversely closer relations between TNCs and governments can result in communities’ requirements being excluded from corporate approaches if community views are at odds with the government (Idemudia 2014). As Idemudia (2011, p. 3) observes, ‘critics point out that in developing countries CSR is a domain of political contestation as opposed to the ideationally neutral terrain, which it is often made out to be by mainstream CSR proponents’. TNCs working with local leaders can contribute to inequitable, customary power relations and splits between civil and customary laws. Consequently, the involvement of TNCs can connect into the distribution of resources, inclusion and exclusion along existing regional, ethnic and religious channels and conflicts (Spencer 2018; Vertigans 2017). Moreover, just as colonialism reinforced and supported some local authorities and laws, community
based CSR can contribute to strengthening the power of particular leaders and
groups while weakening opportunities for civil unity that can be fragmented by
TNC inclusionary and exclusionary criteria for the distribution of resources. Hence,
CSR policies can be directed at particular communities and certain groups of people
will benefit within those communities. For example, Lompo and Trani’s (2013)
research in Nigeria discovered that the educated highest wealth quartile was most
likely to benefit from CSR activities while the poorest were not reported to be
benefitting either financially or in terms of empowerment.

The Niger Delta, in Nigeria, is a high profile region where concerns about
corporate approaches to communities have been particularly vocal. Oil and gas
companies were involved in allocating resources to strategically positioned commu-
nities which resulted in significant changes in dynamics with neighbouring groups.
Similarly money has been paid to youth groups who have the capability to damage
pipelines and wells in a manner which has been described as protection money.
These approaches to community relations were accompanied, as Ite (2007) outlines,
by Shell’s Community Assistance approach (1960–1997). Communities were
portrayed as helpless victims, contributing to a dependency culture. This positioning
of communities as what Banerjee (2002, p. 22) describes as ‘passive recipients of the
beneficiaries of development’ has contributed to an extension of TNC roles. Conse-
quently, like the colonialist programme before them, CSR is providing salvation
from famine, deadly diseases, today often HIV/AIDS, corruption and ‘backward-
ness’. Underpinning these programmes is the TNCs ability to devise the parameters
for involvement and to define the problems to be resolved. Yet as critics of
development approaches such as Escobar (1995) have argued, problems such as
low life expectancy, poor housing and sanitation have recently emerged as problems.
In other words, representations within colonialism and the postcolonial period, allied
to campaigns against global poverty, have established the basis on which people live
in poverty and those requiring assistance. Subsistence living and the informal
economy are caught within these imposed poverty parameters. Northern hemisphere
philanthropists, economists, academics, politicians, musicians, NGO and CSR prac-
titioners are all involved, to various degrees in overcoming the problems they have
determined exist.

TNCs tend to follow within this narrative, protecting local people from local
conditions and improving human rights of other peoples which in essence can mean
protecting people from their indigenous culture. Spivak’s (1999, p. 192) pointed
observation that ‘white men are saving brown women from brown men’ can be
extended to also include white women as saviours but the essential point remains.
Clearly, there are dangers within postcolonial criticism that the excesses of relativ-
ism can be overly applied to benevolent examples. Nevertheless, as Spivak (ibid.)
explains, the logics of salvation that are being applied are often complacent,
neglecting the rights and abilities of local peoples to make their own decisions or
find indigenous solutions. Moreover, as McCarthy (2017) argues, CSR related
gender empowerment programmes tend to lift women out of history and politics
with the focus on individual female entrepreneurs separated from the deep rooted
structural and institutional factors that continue to explain wider inequalities. Razack
(1998, p. 170) proposes key questions to be asked by human rights activists, postcolonialists, and to which CSR proponents could be added, such as ‘Am I positioning myself as the saviour of less fortunate people? As the progressive one?…’. In essence, there are what Malreddy et al. (2015, p. 193) describe as ‘human rights discourse … strongly lodged within humanitarian discourses of Western benevolence’.

5 Knowledge of the Few for the Many

The construction, application and communication of ‘knowledge’ from colonial times onwards have been integral to postcolonial analysis. Following the acceleration of globalisation, ways in which knowledge is constructed across larger distances have been transformed. In this section, I will argue that Global North knowledge development and application are instrumental within CSR programmes.

Colonial knowledge was integral in the processes of domination and policy formation with academics instrumental in the Eurocentric self-regard for the superiority of their insights. Ways of understanding have been interwoven with benevolent approaches and power maintained and reinforced through knowledge applied within institutions and across everyday life. ‘Colonization was undertaken by a workforce that from the start included knowledge workers: priests, clerks, engineers, map-makers, and soon enough lawyers, accountants, architects, teachers and researchers’ (Connell et al. 2017, p. 24).

For Said (1978) the superiority of Western knowledge was accompanied by a degradation of knowledge on behalf of systems of thoughts such as colonialism. Early forms of ‘knowledge’ arose with anthropology and economics. Studies of indigenous peoples and development focussed upon difference explained by ill-founded primitive, backward caricatures and racial classifications. The colonised were largely attributed with childlike characteristics requiring paternal rulers who were best placed to help the helpless natives. These ‘insights’ into the colonised ‘other’ provided both the explanation and justification for colonial domination and the interwoven civilising intent outwardly portrayed as the benevolent face of European domination. Influence was to be long standing because ‘the perverse longevity of the colonised is nourished, in part, by persisting colonial hierarchies of knowledge and value’ (Gandhi 1998, p. 7).

Moreover, the lack of historical awareness and specificity within CSR is indicative of ways in which portrayals of Africa have become split between abstract universalism and intimate paternalism (Mamdani 1996). For example, the mining company Rio Tinto (2016, p. 32) in their corporate report under the heading ‘Contributing to strong and prosperous communities’ describe how ‘through our investments in, for example, health and education services our business makes significant positive contributions to the growth of local economies and the improvement of living standards’. Similarly, BHP Billiton (2016, p. 36) discuss, playing an ‘important role in developing economies and improving standards of living’. Less
modestly, de Beers (2016) suggest that their partnership with the government ‘has helped take Botswana from being one of the poorest countries in Africa to being one of its biggest modern economic success stories’. And the adoption of benevolence underpinned by northern hemisphere perceptions and salvational intentions have been delivered by people who Fanon (2001, p. 29) describes as ‘moral teachers’ who ‘separate the exploited from those in power’.

The early colonial emphasis on the construction of ‘universal’ knowledge in Europe and North America, and exclusion of non-Western thought, has been replicated in subsequent generations of social science (Onwuzuruigbo (2017) and Connell et al. (2017). Chakrabarty (1992, p. 3) argues that, for generations now, philosophers and thinkers shaping the nature of social science have produced theories embracing the entirety of humanity; as we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind i.e., those living in non-Western cultures.

Today although there is a more extensive epistemological critique of Western knowledge systems, significant gaps in the making of knowledge in Southern contexts remain. Moreover, with indigenous modes of knowledge undermined during colonialism and only weakly reintroduced following independence, European and North American insights remain dominant. Their universal application of knowledge and understanding continue to reverberate in settings and experiences that differ both in where they formed and are being applied (Drebes 2016). When, allied to colonial memories, TNCs create and represent places, practices and distances between north and south as discursive knowledge. And over recent decades ‘professional services’ organisations have appeared such as accountancies, law and management that sell Westernised knowledge as essential for business around the world (Boussebaa and Morgan 2014). The work of Foucault (1978) continues to influence perceptions of the interplay between postcolonial knowledge and power, despite his relative neglect of agency and ironically ethno-centric applications (Loomba 2005). By controlling the mode and distribution of knowledge the powerful can speak on behalf of sections of the population who are denied a voice by those who claim to represent and understand their interests and characteristics. Today, Onwuzuruigbo (2017) explains how indigenous knowledge continues to be marginalised despite attempts to produce localised insights. Consequently, global knowledge is shaped by northern hemisphere academic, business and political perceptions that stem from relatively narrow social milieu and nationalities. Moreover, ‘knowledge’ within many former colonies tends to be disseminated in English. For instance, CSR programmes, such as Chevron (2013) and Petra Diamonds (2016) provide English school education in countries where indigenous languages dominate. And as aside Chevron has also been involved in a Loaves and Fishes program with Christian religious connotations (Chevron 2013; Loaves and Fishes 2017)

The power of corporate discourse based on narrowly drawn wells of knowledge can appear morally justifiable, ‘systematic and coherent, specifying the only reasonable and possible way in which people can act in order to realise their intentions’ (Sharp 2006, p. 217). In light of the self-centred knowledge base within northern
hemisphere activities there is an element of irony. Carroll and Shabana (2010) highlight critical concerns about corporate involvement including the lack of appropriate expertise within TNCs to address social activities. The global nature of organisations further complicates organisational approaches to extending knowledge parameters as they look to assimilate international vicissitudes in forms of behaviour, law, financial contributions, ethics, human rights and expectations. Yet TNCs appraisal of their strategies and knowledge of the regions is limited. And regions that have the most acute social and environmental crises are, as Visser (2006) points out, also the locations with the most rapidly expanding economics. Hence, these are the settings where development has the most dramatic social and environmental impacts yet where there is limited international knowledge on which to devise and implement corporate approaches.

With limited appraisal of the environment or community, TNCs are establishing new sites and businesses and have been applying their underlying expectations. Roberts (2006) compares the depth of investigations into new markets and competitors with limited investigation into understanding new locations or community impacts of activities. Furthermore, enhanced familiarity of local conditions could acknowledge that other forms of moral principles and voluntary regulation are already embedded within economic enterprises in different contexts. And as Newell and Frynas (2007, p. 669) have argued, CSR’s misplaced focus can mean ‘we fail to tackle, or worse, deepen, the multiple forms of inequality and social exclusion that characterise contemporary forms of poverty’. For the authors this is typical of the lack of knowledge about CSR’s developmental potential and claims made about CSR’s role in social and economic development are often weakly substantiated’ (Newell and Frynas 2007, p. 671).

In essence, the adaptation of terms such as ‘developing’ and ‘underdeveloped’ within CSR approaches are indicative of postcolonial modernisation programmes that have been initiated by the former colonialists and international agencies. For Edward Said (1978) these terms are typical of ‘imagined geographies’ that homogenize people within underpinning connotations such as backward, barbarian etc. and moral, cultural, economic or socio-political attributes semantically developed judgements. These images are often simplified and distorted and not based upon actual experiences and lived relationships. Knowledge, as Said points out, becomes a form of power in the implementation process.

### 6 Conclusion

Exposing CSR to critical application of postcolonial adaptations of knowledge and power within a longer term trajectory draws comparisons with colonial civilising missions. Both colonial and corporate missions have been underpinned by unequal power differentials and include aims to raise health, educational and living standards. At first glance these aims can appear laudable. However the reality is that programmes are contributing to dependence and reinforcement of northern
hemisphere solutions to southern hemisphere problems. In so doing, TNCs continue to reinforce perceptions of global north dominance and values which become integral to individual progress. And by selecting programmes to be funded, and often the individuals to be sponsored and community leaders to engage, TNC strategies create the parameters for community and individual ‘advancement’ and the barriers for the excluded majority. That the TNCs are able to do so is indicative of the dominance of their power and knowledge levels that are reinforced by the advancement of the beneficiaries of their support who are better positioned to progress into corporate, media and political positions of responsibility. Moreover as Sharp (2006) argues, the limited focus highlights the implications and consequences, often unintentional (Vertigans 2017), of businesses becoming drivers of development. The lack of relevant expertise in development allied to limited regional knowledge has contributed to TNCs investing in ways that fail to consider how their actions impact not only upon the immediate communities but unintentionally help shape regional political and economic dynamics.

The imbalance in power relations partly stems from the partiality of Northern hemisphere knowledge. Arguably, more detached, inter-disciplinary approaches would provide more rounded insights that are better able to position activities within historical and contemporaneous contexts. However, Kuhn et al. (2015) argues that this potential is significantly underdeveloped. Despite considerable common interests, methodological differences, different behavioural assumptions and modes of inquiry allied to tensions between academic disciplines have resulted in limited exchange between disciplines such as economics and development studies.

Nevertheless, despite this critique, it is important to acknowledge signs of improvement in better informed, broader approaches. For instance, a tendency towards generic global applications is changing. In Africa GIZ (2014) identified large business CSR programmes in Cameroon, Ghana Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia that focus primarily on employee matters or philanthropic projects in health, education and poverty and sport (in Ghana), ‘beyond compliance’ and social emergency situations (Senegal). In part, these situations may be influenced by demand for greater CSR involvement against a backdrop of weak governments and governance. By comparison, in South America, more robust regulatory pressures can be found with programmes that connect into history of protection of workers’ rights that can be to the disadvantage of those not employed in protectionist industries.

Greater emphasis on difference and flexibility is in part a consequence of enhanced commitment to meaningful stakeholder engagement. By comparison with colonial times, Adanhounme (2011) observes how contemporary local actors can negotiate and influence corporate narratives and practices that was not previously possible. More inclusive networking has spread power. Another crucial difference is that intentions behind CSR are usually to influence the lives of a fraction of nations’ populations rather than rule over the majority. However as explained above, TNCs can inadvertently have a much wider impact than intended.

Rolling out CSR into communities contributes to a social and business environment that is conducive to, and supportive of approaches becoming embedded within
surrounding relationships. CSR ‘can only have real substance if it embraces all the stakeholders of a company’ with social and environmental sustainable goals ‘embedded across the organization horizontally and vertically’ (Frankental 2001, p. 23). By opening up channels for meaningful communication, affected peoples are able to contribute to policy direction. Inevitably decisions will be made that do not suit all stakeholders. In these circumstances, open, transparent decision-making and communication processes will enhance the likelihood of keeping different stakeholders on board. Moreover, TNCs are better informed about peoples who are in disagreement and can take steps to further engage in order to manage any subsequent difficulties.

Despite extensive procedures, considerable cynicism remains about the level of, and intent behind, stakeholder engagement. However, even if undertaken comprehensively and in good faith CSR strategies struggle, as Amaeshi (2011) suggests, when isolated from other complementary institutional configurations. When encountering considerable localised difficulties, corporate solutions can be severely restricted. Therefore, rather than look to provide short term, isolated solutions programmes need integration within broader activities including material resources and external factors. A greater concentration of targeted resources will better enable deeper underlying causes to be addressed. Moreover, the introduction of more extensive collaborations will overcome some of the concerns regarding corporate legitimacy when engaged in political, social and wider economic matters. By opening up the partnership framework to consolidate different stakeholders and accommodate different expectations and demands, power differentials are diminished in part through the greater resonance of localised knowledge. When TNCs realise that indigenous knowledge is invaluable to the effectiveness of their operations, these insights both improve corporate working and contribute to stronger mutual interdependence and empowerment of local knowledge providers. In turn this reliance on indigenous insights diminishes the power differential with the identification of both problems and solutions no longer the sole responsibility for TNCs. Through TNCs working in partnership together and with the range of stakeholders more meaningful, representative aims can be created within a sustainable direction that is owned by the necessary partners in the delivery of respective and mutual interests. And as Buckler’s following chapter explains, the implementation of local content within many Global South countries is resulting in TNCs having to comply with local regulations which help to reshape some power relations and levels of interdependency.

Finally, greater familiarity of local conditions can lead to an awareness of historical failings and sensitivities. Such insights should also acknowledge that other forms of moral principles and voluntary regulation are already embedded within different contexts. For this to occur, Amaeshi et al. (2006, p. 13) explain that CSR ‘can be neutrally positioned within the non-market environmental strategy without any moral taints, and without losing its objectives’ although I would add that this depends on the objectives. Hence, rather than seek to replace indigenous forms with Western ethical principles and activities, TNCs can incorporate different strands of social responsibility within an expanding, inclusive framework.
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