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**RECLAIMING THE CHILD LEFT BEHIND: THE CASE FOR CORPORATE
CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY**

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RECLAIMING THE CHILD LEFT BEHIND: THE CASE FOR CORPORATE CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY

Abstract

Although a reasonable understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) exists, one dimension remains largely ignored. That is, the cultural impacts of corporations, or the bearing, at various levels, of their business models, activities, and outcomes on the value systems and enduring beliefs of affected people. We introduce the notion of corporate cultural responsibility (CCR). The way corporations address CCR concerns can be reflected according to three stances: cultural destructiveness, cultural carelessness, and cultural prowess. Taken sequentially, they reflect a growing comprehension and increasingly active consideration of CCR concerns by corporations. In turn, we explicitly address issues related to the complex question of determining the cultural responsibilities of corporate actors; specify key CCR-related conceptualizations; and lay a foundation for discussions, debates, and research efforts centered on CCR concerns and rationales.

Keywords

Corporate cultural responsibility; corporate social responsibility; cultural carelessness; cultural destructiveness; cultural prowess; shared values.

*Little wonder that Jacob Burckhardt called this precious
jewel in humanity's crown "the thread in the labyrinth."*

—D.O. Schafer

Introduction

In recent decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has progressively risen in importance—and on global executives' agendas. Stakeholders increasingly expect corporations to take on socially oriented responsibilities (Greening and Turban, 2000; Maignan and Ferrell, 2004; Sen et al., 2006), and CSR-related ideas are going mainstream, as management and marketing pundits join the conversation (Kotler and Lee, 2005; Porter and Kramer, 2006, 2011). Furthermore, CSR represents a growing part of business education (Ceulemans et al., 2011; Matten and Moon, 2004). Although the CSR concept remains contested (Blowfield, 2005; Doane, 2005; Henderson, 2009), it appears widely acknowledged as a global business issue whose time has come (Franklin, 2008; Wolff, 2002). For example, international standards for CSR implementation and reporting guidelines have been carefully refined (Global Reporting Initiative, 2000, 2002, 2011; ISO, 2010), and though many corporate actors still pursue mostly shallow CSR-related actions or just adopt CSR rhetoric, a growing number of corporations also endeavors to engage in integrated, CSR-related initiatives that incorporate social and environmental expectations into their products, manufacturing activities, organizational and inter-organizational processes, and strategic goals.

In parallel with these policy and practice developments, scholars and academics have dedicated notable efforts to defining the nature and content of CSR (Carroll, 1999; Frederick, 1998; Garriga and Melé, 2004). A reasonable research consensus thus defines CSR as related to the extent to which a corporation furthers some social good, through its voluntary actions that go beyond its direct interest or what is required by law (Doh and Guay, 2006;

McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; van Marrewijk, 2003). In this sense, the CSR notion is commonly understood as encompassing economic and legal requirements, but also ethical and discretionary responsibilities, as expected or desired by global stakeholders (Carroll, 2004). Such CSR-related stakeholder expectations typically refer to several key dimensions, including governance, environmental and ecological preservation, labor standards, employee and community relations, responsible sourcing, and social equity.

Through a careful consideration of extant international management and CSR literature, as well as actual corporate practices, we argue in this short essay that one dimension of CSR remains largely ignored though, or at least dealt with only implicitly by both practitioners and academics. That is, we note the cultural impacts of corporations, or the bearing, at various levels, of their business models, activities, and outcomes on the value systems and enduring beliefs of affected people. In a global business environment, the growing influences of corporations on extant cultures and the corporate responsibilities that conceivably could be associated with them have, until very recently, been widely disregarded.

On practitioners' side, most frameworks for reporting CSR include principles and indicators of corporate practices that are economically, socially, and environmentally responsible. Issues linked to culture, sometimes highlighted as the fourth but central pillar of sustainability (e.g., Canadian International Development Agency, 1997; Hawkes, 2001; Nurse, 2006), hardly ever appear. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the United Nations Global Compact (2009: 22) notes that "the Global Reporting Initiative's Standard Disclosure includes 79 performance indicators on human rights, labor practices, society, product responsibility and economic impacts. None of these, however, directly addresses issues surrounding cultural rights or cross-cultural tolerance and dialogue." Only in 2010 did the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) 26000 guidelines for social responsibility make an explicit, somewhat trailblazing case for formally integrating cultural

concerns into CSR-related policies, with a call to all corporations to promote cultural activities and respect and value local cultures, cultural traditions, and heritages in the settings in which corporations function.

On the academic side, scholarly work in international management, marketing, business ethics, and CSR rarely deals directly with corporate cultural impacts or responsibilities. International management and marketing studies instead characteristically approach culture in accordance with a utilitarian perspective, as a contextual variable that demands adaptation if the corporation is to develop promising business prospects in more or less distant settings and manage its increasingly diverse workforce. Interrelated notions, such as cross-cultural sensitivity (Harich and LaBahn, 1998; Shapiro et al., 2008), awareness (Buckley et al., 2006; Park and Harrison, 1993), intelligence (Alon and Higgins, 2005; Early and Mosakowski, 2004), competence (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2000; Johnson et al., 2006), and training (Benett et al., 2000; Black and Mendenhall, 1990), are chiefly presented as means to profit-oriented ends. Researchers almost exclusively examine and discuss the role and importance of understanding cultural variations and managing cultural changes to foster the development of corporate activities. In CSR-related research, studies dealing with culture mainly highlight the ways in which so-called national cultural backgrounds influence and orient conceptions and understandings of corporate responsibilities (e.g., Freeman and Hasnaoui, 2010; Kim and Kim, 2010; Waldman et al., 2006; Wang and Juslin, 2009). A somewhat limited body of research also has sought to define whether and how corporations should adapt CSR policies and ethics programs to different cultural settings to accommodate legitimate cultural differences (e.g., Arthaud-Day, 2005; Husted and Allen, 2006; Logsdon and Wood, 2002). Yet scholars barely elaborate on the actual nature of potential corporate responsibilities related to the respect and preservation of such cultural backgrounds. Although some business ethicists have endeavored to derive relevant,

transnational, ethical decision-making models for corporate actors (e.g., Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994, 1999; Robertson and Crittenden, 2003), questions surrounding the cultural responsibilities of corporations persist—often neglected or unheeded.

With this essay, we adopt a challenging, or at least thought-provoking, stance and seek to subvert the extant focus by suggesting that we approach culture not as a contextual variable to consider when developing proficient business activities but rather as a societal constituent that may be subject to the impacts of business activities, as well as an end in itself. In so doing, we attempt to define the potential responsibility of the corporation related to the influence and impact of its operations and activities on cultures, spread throughout various settings, including the various levels at which the corporation operates. This effort represents a response to commentators over the past decade who have noted that most scholarly efforts focus on “developing theories of how environments affect organizations and, more recently, how organizations affect each other. It is time for [scholars] to pay much closer attention to how organizations alter and even create their environments” (Barley, 2007: 214).

To this end, we introduce an unsettled, CSR-related notion of corporate cultural responsibility (CCR). Our succinct categorization of CCR features three stances that characterize corporations’ approaches to CCR concerns: cultural destructiveness, cultural carelessness, and cultural prowess. In turn, we explicitly address issues related to the complex question of determining the cultural responsibilities of corporate actors; specify key CCR-related conceptualizations; and lay a foundation for discussions, debates, and research efforts centered on CCR concerns and rationales.

Defining Culture

“Culture” has always been a complex concept, studied in academic areas ranging from anthropology to psychology to sociology to international business management. Thus, defining culture is a fairly thorny proposition. More than 60 years ago, Kroeber and

Kluckhohn (1952) already could cite 164 definitions of culture, which also could be classified into distinct categories. According to Cohen (2009: 195), these early definitions included

broad definitions that focused on content; definitions that focused on social heritage or tradition; normative definitions that focused on rules or ways of doing things; psychological definitions that focused on adjustment or problem solving; structural definitions that focused on patterns and organizations; genetic definitions that focused on culture as a product or artifact; as well as incomplete or metaphorical definitions.

Adding to the complexity, culture comprises multiple constituents, such as its material and subjective forms (Triandis, 1972). Material culture refers to elements such as clothing, food, housing, tools, and machines, as well as objects such as goods, services, technology, and the methods people employ to share them (Cohen, 2009). Subjective culture instead refers to a group's characteristic perceptions of the social environment (Landis et al., 1985), which represents the "how and why we behave in certain ways, how we perceive reality, what we believe to be true, what we build and create, and what we accept as good and desirable" (Westby, 1993: 9). This subjective part also includes "ideas about how to make the elements of material culture (e.g., how do we build a house), how to live properly, how to behave in relation to objects and people" (Triandis, 2002: 3).

In terms of scope, cultures may seem very broad, as in examples of national identity (e.g., Uruguayans, Danes), or they may be more delimited, as exemplified by ethnic minorities (e.g., Pan and Pfeil [2004] count 54 ethnic minorities in Europe, or some 105 million people, including the Basques of northern Spain and southern France, the Sami of northern Scandinavia, and Ashkenazi Jews in France and Germany, for example) or cultures specific to common interests and beliefs that bind different participants or stakeholders (e.g., contemporary urban, punk, or hippie cultures).

For the purposes of our argument, we adopt an integrative perspective, in which culture relies essentially on shared values (see Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993; Hofstede, 1991; Parsons and Shils, 1951). In line with Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952: 172-173), we concur that

values provide the only basis for the fully intelligible comprehension of culture, because the actual organization of all cultures is primarily in terms of their values. This becomes apparent as soon as one attempts to present the picture of a culture without reference to its values.

Without values, culture appears as a meaningless aggregation of elements, whose relationships with one another occur “only through coexistence in locality and moment” (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 171). Values represent the enduring beliefs that a particular mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or contradictory mode or end-state (Rokeach, 1973). Therefore, cultures reflect systems of values and beliefs that underlie and accompany the myriad of behaviors and practices that represent distinct ways of life (Gregory, 1983). They embody “patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts” (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 181).

Globalization, Culture, and the Influence of Corporate Activities

Examining modern culture-related dynamics, especially with a focus on corporate activities, almost inevitably entails a discussion of globalization processes and consequences (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Olivier et al., 2008). Globalization, from an economic perspective, refers to “the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states, and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation states

to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before” (Friedman, 2000: 9).

In this context, marked by the compression of spatial and temporal dimensions, the world appears to be trending progressively toward one big global market (Friedman, 2000, 2005), such that globalization typically is associated with homogenization, at least on a cultural level (see Baughn and Buchanan, 2001; Gans, 1985). That is, Weberian rationalization and the search for economic efficiency ultimately may lead to the synchronization of cultural processes across the globe. This cultural convergence hypothesis is best illustrated from a corporate perspective, in the common admission that there are

few high streets in the cities of Europe, Asia or North America now without the ubiquitous McDonald’s, KFC, Starbucks, and Gap stores. And although much attention has focused on American multinationals, European Stores such as Benetton, H&M, Tesco and others have also contributed to this progressive erosion of differences (Crane and Matten, 2007: 338).

This syndrome is familiarly referred to as the “McDonaldization” or “Cocacolonization” of societies (Howes, 1996; Ritzer, 1998); from this perspective, market integration and corporations’ associated activities abrade local values and particularities, leading to worldwide cultural standardization—and specifically, Westernized uniformity along with decreased cultural diversity. For critics (e.g., Clarke, 1996; Klein, 2000), this form of cultural imperialism occurs through ideological indoctrination, in that “beliefs and attitudes are instilled in the culture, affecting its norms, values and aspirations,” which “favors modern consumerism over traditional knowledge” (Ervin and Smith, 2008: 36).

Yet local cultures and their specificities may be more resistant to the erosive effect of globalization than these critics predict (see de Mooij, 2009). For example, Huntington (1996) offers a vivid, cultural persistence view and warns against either simply assuming that the

apparent spread of specific fashions constitutes an effective cultural convergence or misidentifying transitory fads as long-term culture changes. Resilience, resurgence, and reaffirmation of some lasting differences in cultural values arise across civilizations, largely as a result of globalization and its resultant political, economic, and social tensions. In this sense, “cultural balkanization,” or cultural fragmentation, is part of the same reality that produces globalization (Friedman, 1990; Husted, 2002).

Most authors propose a middle way though, in which globalization generates new or altered cultural forms through processes of creolization, metissage, and emerging syncretism (Hannerz, 1992; Lull, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). From this perspective, globalization and perceived cultural homogenization processes get counterbalanced by strong local influences, because the introduction of and contacts with other cultures result in mixed global and local elements, generating new cultural forms and “cultural hybridization” (Garcia-Canclini, 1995; Ralston et al. 1993; Shimoni and Bergmann, 2006). For example, Mickey Mouse remains recognizable in Latin America “but is routinely adapted to the need of the local culture” (Husted, 2003: 430). That is, material objects and their uses get altered and adapted to reflect subjective local values and attitudes, which characterize local cultures. In this sense, adopting a cultural object or practice can “never mean the same thing to the adopting culture as it did in the original culture” (Husted, 2003: 432), and true cultural homogenization is virtually impossible.

Moving the homogenization–balkanization–hybridization debate to the corporate level, where we find central agents of globalization (Amoore, 2002; Liou et al., 2012), we find that one central debate has dominated international marketing and management scholarship for the past 30 years: Should companies ride the globalization wave, relying on the premise that cultural convergence across the globe will trigger the convergence of stakeholders’ needs and preferences (to be met with global marketing and organizational

strategies), or should they cater to the diversity of local, hybridized stakeholder beliefs and preferences (addressed through multi-domestic, tailored marketing and organizational strategies)? This central concern and the questions that accompany it are critical for fostering positive business prospects and deserve substantial attention. Yet scholars have granted virtually no attention to the flip side of this question, namely, to the actual influence of business models and corporate practices on extant cultures. In most cases, corporate activities and their outcomes get presented simply as neutral or culture-free; when their inherently culturally laden dimension is acknowledged, it is usually in a utilitarian perspective, as a means to profit-oriented corporate ends.

Despite this presentation of corporate activities and their outcomes as culture-free, we argue that few of them actually are. The actual influence of most corporate activities and their outcomes on extant cultures take different forms and have various impacts, including the insertion of a cultural sphere of influence into local settings, with little choice or preparation. Such corporate moves are routinely denounced by anti-globalization activists. Beyond such easily identifiable cultural impacts on local and indigenous communities, other instances may link more broadly to the way products and services and their marketing reflect and convey cultural elements of the corporation's home (and corporate) culture (Aaker, 1997; de Mooij, 2005). To a large extent, Apple, Walt Disney, and Nike reflect so-called American values and globally export the symbols of an American way of life. McDonald's opened nearly 1,200 restaurants in 2011; it welcomes clients every day in more than 33,000 outlets, from Moldova to Morocco to Western Samoa. Lacoste and L'Oreal symbolize and spread certain aspects of the French way of life; Samsung and LG Electronics convey a South Korean-specific, harmony-driven, cultural background. These corporations also communicate specific values, such that people and groups at various levels, whether they want to or not, are exposed to and potentially influenced by implicit and explicit cultural underpinnings. Among a wealth of

examples, social psychology studies highlight the significant impact that big social media corporations have had in shaping a culturally “brave new world” (e.g., Heath, 2012). Marketing studies further show that corporate food marketing to children influences their typically culture-specific food-related beliefs, preferences, and behaviors (Hastings et al., 2003; Livingstone, 2005).

Cultural underpinnings thus must be clearly acknowledged as tied to corporate activities and their outcomes (e.g., products, services), as well as recognized as conveying symbolic meanings that go beyond the functional utility of the products or services (e.g., Belk, 1988 Berger and Heath, 2007; Clarke et al., 2002). For years, corporations have taken this reality into consideration in their development and commercialization strategies. The development of corporate activities and their outcomes, which include the design, production, and marketing of products and services, thus constitutes a “culture-making process in which ideas, values, norms and beliefs are ... symbolically expressed in the environment to create new cultural forms and meanings” (Low, 1988: 187). Corporations thus represent—whether by contributing to cultural convergence, persistence, or cross-vergence processes, and whether they are active in cultural industries or not—virtually inescapably powerful culture shapers at both global and local levels.

Tentative Delineation of CCR

If corporations, through their activity, affect systems of values and beliefs in the settings in which they operate, should they be concerned? That is, to what level are corporations responsible for cultures and their alteration, evaporation, or threat, and thus for what might be lost as a result of corporate activities and their outcomes?

We assume that cultures represent a key concern for corporations, just as they do for any other social institutions, because cultures possess both inherent and instrumental worth. They can be valued in themselves and as means to obtain other desired or valued aspects. The

reasons to engage in vigilant treatment and defense of cultures include the diversity and innovative quality of cultural options (Dworkin, 1985; Raz, 1986), the equality of opportunity (Kymlicka, 1989), and the notion that cultures have intrinsic value, linked to components of a good and happy life and the ability to foster individual well-being (Courtois, 2008; Musschenga, 1998). Respect for cultural diversity and tolerance is “inseparable from respect for human dignity” (UNESCO, 2002: 4), and it must be nurtured to grow and develop.

In this context, because “the influence of corporations penetrates into the very fabric of modern cultural understandings and practices” (Brammer et al., 2012: 6), we suggest that certain corporate responsibilities, related to their impact on extant cultures in both remote and closer settings, actually arise out of the great, and increasing, potential power they have over extant cultures. Corporations are not self-sufficient entities with unchallengeable rights to independent action. They exist only through the commitment and cooperation of society, so “they are members of society, with obligations and constraints, as well as privileges” (Logsdon and Wood, 2002: 1585). The nature and type of cultural responsibilities societies and their members place on corporations, in exchange for these privileges (e.g., limited liability) are therefore matters of public concern and deserve more extensive consideration.

The nature and scope of what we propose to designate as CCR is difficult to define and controversial though. Therefore, we start by clarifying what, for us, CCR is not. First, the phrase “corporate cultural responsibility” already exists in corporate discourse and managerial literature, used to designate a modern, evolved form of artistic and cultural sponsoring, or “the cultural commitment of firms, such as the buildup of art collections, cultural provisions for employees, sponsoring of art and culture as well as patronage” (Kohl, 2007: 343). We acknowledge the interest and relevance of this specific meaning, but our broader perspective goes beyond a focus on arts or a philanthropic orientation, to avoid an overly narrow conceptualization of potential cultural influences and responsibilities.

Second, cultures are not hermetically bound or discrete; the notion of culture is constantly “contested, fragmented, contextualized and emergent” (Wilson, 1997: 9). Therefore, we acknowledge that cultures are dynamic and in a state of becoming at all times, such that the delineation we introduce should not be taken to suggest a comprehensive, content-based, or potentially static definition. For CCR, we consider such a definition irrelevant and practically impossible.

Third, we ground our conception of CCR in the foundational assertion that “each culture has a dignity and value which must be respected and preserved” (UNESCO, 1967: 87). As we noted previously, each culture is entitled to respect, and cultures should be appreciated for their differences. We further argue that “other” cultures retain the room and “have the right to shape their own cultural and economic values” (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999: 232). However, even as we argue for cultural engagement and dialogue across cultures through corporate activities, we also argue that our conception of CCR is not culturally relativist, as we discuss subsequently. In turn, we define CCR as follows:

Corporate cultural responsibility refers to the extent to which a corporation voluntarily develops its activities in a manner that recognizes and ensures the conscious consideration, respect, and defense of the systems of values and beliefs underlying and accompanying the myriad of behaviors and practices that represent extant cultures in the various settings in which the corporation operates.

In our view, CCR—in line with and as a subset of CSR—pertains to the actions of the corporation and its managers that go beyond legal requirements and are willingly developed to maintain or contribute to culturally related societal welfare. Furthermore, it relates to the way corporations and their managers address the cultural specificities of different groups that may be affected by their activities, at transnational, national, regional, or local levels. It comprises an acknowledgment of the potential impact of corporate activities and their

outcomes on extant cultures in both remote and nearby settings, and this acknowledgment leads to subsequent corporate decisions and initiatives that attempt to ensure respect for and foster cultural richness and dignity.

Our conception of CCR thereby translates individual cultural responsibilities, such as those emphasized by Schafer (1996, 2008), into the corporate realm and suggests that corporations have the duty to develop the experience, knowledge, tools, and know-how required to engage in making a constructive, enduring contribution to cultural life. To do so, we argue that the corporation must, among other things, develop

a reasonable understanding of the culture's historical development, contemporary circumstances and local, regional and national orientation; participate actively in the cultural life of the community, the region and the nation as a creator, expeditor, participant, spectator, audience member and citizen; respect the laws, mores, customs and traditions of the culture; endeavor to change in positive and constructive ways those laws, mores, customs and traditions which should be changed for reasons of moral integrity or human conscience; and respect the rights, privileges, freedoms, values and beliefs of others (Schafer, 1996: 296).

That is, our account of CCR is grounded in the view that evolution in a globalizing world need not mean that material and subjective cultural elements, coming under threat of homogenization, hybridization, or any other process, must be abandoned by corporations. Rather, by including the corporate side, evolution can proceed, hand-in-hand, with an increasingly solid, "arising consciousness for one's own cultural characteristics" (Breidenbach and Zukrigl, 2005: 13).

Some culturally grounded mores, customs, or traditions also might be subject to corporations' critical evaluation, for reasons related to moral integrity or human conscience, so our view of CCR also rejects a "caricatured" conception of the defense of cultural

specificities. That is, in addition to cultural imperialism—which fails to offer any ground for respecting legitimate variations in systems of values and beliefs—CCR rejects cultural relativism, despite its helpful reminder that all people are, to some extent, determined by their backgrounds and that they can achieve happy, free, excellent lives in accordance with varying systems of beliefs. Yet the problem with cultural relativism is that it tends to leave corporations and their representatives unable to engage critically in a reconsideration of cultural systems and practices in “other” cultures that they perceive as questionable. In this context, we place respect for the dignity and integrity of extant cultures at the heart of our conception of CCR but simultaneously acknowledge that it cannot exist at any cost. For example, international standards of justice should always be promoted, and corporations must retain their “duty to maintain the conditions under which human rights can be exercised” (Logsdon and Wood, 2002: 169).

The CCR notion thus must walk a fine line between cultural imperialism and relativism. The fundamental tension between these standpoints cannot be alleviated by simply allowing one to override the other (Gressgard, 2012); for corporations engaged in CCR, this tension must be understood as a trigger for ongoing dilemmas. To identify and acknowledge such dilemmas, “companies need to be sensitive to the transcultural value implications of their actions” (Carroll, 2004: 115), as well as ever vigilant of the need to precede any judgments or actions with attempts to understand the relevant cultural issues. In this sense, CCR entails the adoption and development, by corporations and their representatives, of a critical view of both their own operations and the environment in which they operate.

To address corporations’ cultural impact seriously, we further contend that corporations must remain sincerely open to dialogue when their prevailing values and beliefs are challenged and when they challenge or threaten the persistence of extant systems of values and beliefs at various levels. That is, ongoing tension and dilemmas unavoidably underlie the

delineation of CCR and the way corporations address CCR concerns, so these tensions ideally should be addressed systematically in practice, using well-defined procedures. To devise pragmatic answers to the dilemmas they face while trying to balance cultural imperialism and relativism, corporations can adopt CCR-oriented decision-making models, rooted in the cross-cultural dialogical processes in which they engage with society and its diverse constituents.

With this short essay, we principally aim to provide a preliminary basis for future scholarly discussions and conceptualization efforts related to CCR concerns. In this context, certain existing contributions in international business and business ethics fields might constitute constructive sources of inspiration for scholars interested in CCR. These contributions include the multi-tiered or integrated social contracts theory (ISCT) (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994, 1999), which seeks to reconcile hypothetical transcultural values with culturally laden ones in international business operations. Considering the diverse criticisms faced by ISCT (see Douglas, 2000; Husted, 1999; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007), forward-looking contingency models of decision making might enrich the reflections that will underlie the development of proper CCR-related decision-making models, such as those that Gilbert and Behnam (2009) derive from Habermasian philosophy and discursive processes between corporations and their societal environments to advance ISCT.

Corporate Cultural Responsibility Stances

The way corporations actually address CCR concerns, as we have delineated them, can be reflected according to three potential CCR stances: (1) cultural destructiveness, (2) cultural carelessness, or (3) cultural prowess. These three stances reflect corporations' distinct corporate attitudes, policies, and practices. Taken sequentially, they reflect a growing comprehension and increasingly active consideration of CCR concerns by corporations.

Cultural destructiveness

Corporations characterized by a *cultural destructiveness* stance present corporate attitudes, policies, and practices that are deliberately damaging to existing systems of values, enduring beliefs, and their manifestations. Corporations adopt this stance because they, or their leaders, assume that the values and enduring beliefs they convey are superior and should be imposed on the settings in which they operate. Alternatively, and perhaps even more often, the profit-oriented objectives of the corporation seem to inexorably prime cultural concerns that can be directly or indirectly associated with the corporation's activities and their outcomes. In either case, corporate actors deny and reject CCR claims, leading to the dehumanization of cultures and the people who constitute them. A cultural destructiveness stance thus eventually leads to corporations' explicit and active efforts to purge or eliminate extant cultures.

Emblematic examples occur when the cultural foundations of local groups are intrinsically connected with the land they inhabit; corporations exploiting the land or natural resources in its soil consciously threaten the very survival of these extant cultures. Disconnection from the land has the capacity to damage or even destroy cultures closely tied to their environments. The effects of dispossession clearly create political and social chaos in many indigenous communities (Alfred, 2009). Consider the ongoing battle of the Dongria Kondh community in Orissa, eastern India (Bedi, 2013; Rhoades, 2013). The community is convinced that its cultural foundations and associated way of life will be destroyed if the British corporation Vedanta Resources, operating through a subsidiary named Sterlite Industries India Ltd., receives further legal authorization to exploit the sacred Nyamgiri Mountain to mine for bauxite. The Dongria Kondh risk losing their livelihood, their cultural identity, and the sanctity of the mountain, which represents the physical manifestation of their god (Survival International, 2008). Similarly, the Kayapo nation inhabiting the southern fringes of the Amazon forest in central Brazil has seen its cultural bases threatened for years

by the culture-damaging and -neglecting actions of, among other actors, wood and energy corporations. However, it also has managed to devise relatively efficient ways to defend itself and its culture (Lewellen, 2002; Turner, 2008). These examples are just two among a vast multitude.

Cultural carelessness

Corporations demonstrating a *cultural carelessness* stance represent the great majority of corporate actors. It characterizes corporations that do not explicitly seek to be or assume that they are culturally destructive and reflects a more passive consideration of CCR. Corporations exhibit a lack of forethought and concern in their approach to CCR-related issues, and they tend to neglect or overlook the cultural dynamics and consequences related to their activities. Culture-related responsibilities are ignored because corporations can pretend to be playing a blind game. That is, either the corporation and its managers consider CCR concerns irrelevant, because they challenge corporate activities that are in line with common corporate practices, or else the complacency of their dominant culture leads the corporation simply to ignore CCR concerns.

Yet corporations characterized by cultural carelessness indirectly contribute to damaging, altering, and distorting extant cultures of the settings in which they act. In the mining sector for example, the installation of mining corporations and the massive development of their activities in Papua New Guinea since the 1970s has inevitably distorted the cultural landscape. Beyond the direct cultural destruction, as evoked in the previous section, more indirect cultural impacts result from the development of corporate activities around certain communities. In this case, many communities in the area traditionally featured a culture that relied on feasts and reciprocal hospitality with neighbors to maintain or enhance relative status (see Lemonnier, 1990). But, as suggested by Sweeney (2011), with the progressive accumulation of comparative wealth in the local communities that owned the land

the corporations wanted to use, this cultural equilibrium, which supported the continuation of reciprocal exchanges, appears to have been undermined.

The traditional knowledge of indigenous groups also may have strong spiritual and cultural significance, based in communal ownership norms. Current intellectual property regimes and associated corporate activities often fail to recognize such community ownership or the spiritual and cultural significance of traditional knowledge. For example, the Quechua Indians in Peru vigorously oppose the commercial exploitation of their traditional knowledge, which is foundational to their culture, by corporate actors, but they can do little about it. Similarly, the Maori in New Zealand believe that “even when their knowledge is publicly disclosed, there is no automatic right to use it; that right must be determined collectively” (United Nations Development Programme, 2004: 93).

According to critics, another example of such cultural carelessness comes from the Swedish furniture corporation IKEA. The pressure exerted on local furniture businesses, after the arrival of IKEA stores, may lead to a loss of local cultures and their specificities in the highly culturally laden home furnishing market. In addition, IKEA’s philosophy, price-driven strategy, and explicit encouragement of frequent redecorating may be contributing to cultural homogenization (IKEA currently sells furniture in 38 countries), excessive consumerism, and the emergence of a “waste” culture that undermines extant values and beliefs (see Bailly et al., 2009; Matchan, 2005). Whether all this responsibility can be placed on a single corporation is debatable, but the furnishing giant’s impact on local cultures and their alterations seems undeniable.

Cultural prowess

Finally, corporations characterized by a *cultural prowess* stance develop awareness of the CCR concerns that might be associated with their activities and approach them with a more active, willful posture. Typically, corporations recognize cultural differences and their

instrumental or intrinsic value and endeavor to develop and demonstrate respect and support for the cultural specificities of the settings in which they operate. They also engage in continual self-assessments of their cultural awareness, ongoing cultural knowledge improvement processes, and attention to cultural dynamics, which underlie and can be affected by their activities and consequences. Thus, they tend to address and limit their potentially negative impacts and alterations of extant cultures purposefully; they even may contribute to the preservation and enrichment of existing cultures.

More corporations have made CCR-related public commitments; for example, the French corporation L’Oreal asserts that it “relies on the diversity of its teams to ensure that international development respects local cultures” (L’Oreal, 2010: 5). The Japanese corporation NGK, involved in the manufacture and sale of spark plugs and new ceramics, claims that it respects “the cultures and the customs of local communities where [we] do business and strive to manage [our] activities throughout the world in such a way as to promote and contribute to the development of local communities” (NGK, 2011: 39). But beyond such vague, simplistic, and sometimes misleading public relations commitments or initiatives—which often appear at least partly designed to manipulate public opinion and stakeholders—examples of corporations actually and effectively demonstrating cultural prowess are scarce. Consider Endesa, Spain’s largest electric utility and main private electricity company in Latin America, which reportedly approaches its Latin American operations with an explicit awareness of CCR. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the United Nations Global Compact (2009) offers the corporation as an example and applauds its Chilean Pehuén Foundation, which supports the Pehuenche community’s cultural identity and helps build local capacities for cultural heritage management. However, moves by Endesa in the area since the 1990s have been harshly criticized and emphasized as counter-examples of constructive culture-related practices by activists and local communities as they

may have been a source of “ethnocide”: Since the launch of the Pehuén Foundation in 1992, local and international protests have continually sought to force Endesa to engage in a relatively impossible reparation of the alterations already made (Carruthers and Rodriguez, 2009; Le Bonniec and Guevara, 2008). Cultural prowess must go beyond declarative commitments.

Cultural prowess also is a moving target. The Danish pharmaceutical corporation Novo Nordisk explicitly acknowledges that globalization processes require the corporation “to respect local cultures” but at the same time “pose leadership challenges for companies as they seek to take advantage of globalization while dealing with the dilemmas that are an inherent part of a global marketplace” (Novo Nordisk, 2006: 1). Corporations as agents of globalization—including those from emerging countries (Liou et al., 2012)—thus typically “internalize the contradictions that are implicit in the incorporation of different cultural situations” (Dirlik, 2001: 26). Novo Nordisk asserts that to engage in cultural prowess, corporations must develop clear policies and practices that specify its responses to potential dilemmas and contradictions, in collaboration with stakeholders at various levels.

Discussion

The social and environmental duties of corporations, beyond their legal requirements, increasingly are accepted in business, if sometimes reluctantly on the corporate side. Despite the massive cultural influence of corporations in our complex and globalized world, the cultural responsibilities of corporations appear less clearly established and, in practice, subject to greater disregard. The motives for such neglect certainly are varied: a basic assumption that cultures and their support and enrichment do not represent the business of business; the complexity of any corporate cultural impact; the persistence of a postcolonial tendency for strong culture-centrism. Nevertheless, by downplaying or disregarding the cultural dimension of their activities and focusing almost exclusively on corporate performance, in a narrow

sense, corporations may be ignoring the very elements that make corporate entrepreneurship and business activity meaningful.

As the world continues to proceed through “a period of pronounced and dynamic cultural change” (Schafer, 1996: 286), we propose a preliminary delineation of CCR. We simultaneously acknowledge and suggest that this delineation and the associated CCR stances we present are unsettled and subject to reservations. For example, the conceptions of culture at the heart of our CCR understanding may vary, the motives for supporting and preserving cultures are potentially diverse and often contested, corporate influences on cultures operate at various levels and are difficult to grasp fully, the extent of the potential impact is highly contextual and industry dependent, the normative foundations underlying CCR are debatable, the extent and boundaries of cultural responsibilities of corporate actors remain controversial and hazy, and the potential constraints and opportunities for corporate practices related to the adoption and implementation of CCR policies are significant but poorly identified.

We thus call for ongoing research efforts that critically approach CCR, in an attempt to refine CCR-related notions, advance them, or reform them. Beyond our preliminary introduction of conceptual notions, our main objectives for this essay have been to highlight the need to develop a more explicit consideration of the culture-related issues at stake in corporate activities and demand the greater integration of CCR-related concerns in debates and research about international business and the relationships of business and society. The multitude of potential reservations and tension points we highlight represent just as many lines of research and constitute sources of rich, multidisciplinary, conceptual research efforts.

In addition, the translation of CCR-related objectives into practice through structured and formalized corporate policies and initiatives remains mostly unexplored, beyond emerging, limited, though constructive attempts (see ISO, 2010). Contextualized examples and counterexamples of relevant CCR-related endeavors need to be identified. In particular,

corporate practices that integrate CCR concerns into corporate strategy and day-to-day business activities, beyond public relations or isolated initiatives, should be uncovered and analyzed. In so doing, researchers could determine ways to encourage corporations to actively consider CCR concerns and develop cultural prowess. The change process, by which corporations transition from one cultural stance or stage to another, also needs further investigation. Finally, ways to include CCR concerns more clearly and explicitly in existing CSR or corporate sustainability definitions and frameworks must be devised.

Overall, corporations should contribute to maintaining and developing cultural richness at various levels of their operations. For this purpose, serious debates, critical research efforts, and managerial commitments must complement one another and lead to the development of conceptual and practical tools. With such tools, we can avoid naïve, unbalanced conceptions of CCR-related considerations or an overly simplistic understanding of the pressing, real-world concerns at stake.

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