Rethinking Corporate Social Responsibility in Capitalist Neoliberal Times

Rafaela Costa Camoes Rabello, Karen Nairn and Vivienne Anderson

Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has provoked considerable debate. Initial expressions of CSR can be traced back to the seventeenth century. However, the ideal of socially responsible business was most evident after the depression of the 1930s and the post-war period in the 1950s. CSR was, by then, mainly influenced by values of philanthropy and principles of the welfare state, and mostly centred on corporations’ charitable donations which provided social welfare for materially deprived families and individuals. In the 1980s, there was a marked shift to the neoliberal ideals of profit maximisation and free regulation in corporate activities and this fed through into CSR practices. We argue that these conflicting ideals of CSR create divergent discourses where corporations on the one hand proclaim a lack of self-interest and a duty of care towards host societies, and on the other hand legitimise corporation’s self-interested preoccupation with profit. Divergent care versus profit discourses influence how legislators, CSR experts, corporations and NGOs understand and practise CSR in host societies. In this chapter, we examine how welfare and neoliberal ideologies contribute to divergent discourses of duty of care and profit, and how these discourses influence corporations’ decision-making about their social
The chapter concludes by proposing alternative ways for rethinking political and economic relationships between communities and corporations, in order to move beyond the limits of the current discourses of duty of care and profit.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; neoliberalism; welfare liberalism; neocommunitarianism; discourse; community

INTRODUCTION

In general terms, corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a set of corporate ethics that guides businesses’ practices (Shamir, 2005). Since CSR involves ethical principles of corporate conduct, it is a concept that is in constant flux depending on how different corporations define ethical conduct (Shamir, 2005). CSR is communicated through symbolic and rhetorical means (Shamir, 2005) which are embedded in different political, economic and philosophical understandings of corporate and community relations. How CSR is understood and enacted depends on how each legislator, policy maker, guidelines expert, corporation and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) constructs the meaning of CSR (Shamir, 2005). Although there are numerous approaches towards CSR, CSR actors usually polarise between two main approaches. For instance, there is a growing tendency among CSR users to approach CSR either as a benevolent instrument of care towards the host society or as a corporate apparatus for ensuring companies’ profit maximisation (Shamir, 2005).

Understanding the conflicting political and philosophical traditions of companies, mainly multinationals, can highlight the inconsistencies that creep into companies’ CSR policies and practices. Noteworthy authors have identified and unpacked myriad ways in which CSR is interpreted worldwide (Brejning, 2012; Carroll, 1999, 2008; Castelló and Lozano, 2011; Garriga and Melé, 2004). However, these authors do not address the tension between the different political and philosophical traditions of large corporations. The tensions between these diverse traditions reveal conflicting discourses of profit-making and the duty of care often embedded in CSR discourses, policies and practices in relation to host societies.

This chapter examines the tensions and contradictions that are inherent in understandings of CSR that have been shaped by different welfare liberal and neoliberal ideologies. We begin with an outline of the historical trajectory of contemporary CSR, tracing the origins of current tensions. In doing so, we are mindful of two risks. Firstly, our epistemological and ontological claims may risk oversimplifying the complexity and fluidity of both liberal paradigms and CSR. Secondly, our focus is on the application of welfare liberalism and neoliberalism to CSR but we risk historical simplification, since the chapter does not
provide an in-depth political analysis of capitalism more broadly, or of capitalism in specific geographical contexts. Instead, the chapter focuses on how two different liberal paradigms have impacted on CSR practices with particular attention to possible points of intervention, to open up alternative ways of conceptualising CSR. We propose two alternative ways of conceptualising relations between companies and societies, which may assist companies, governments and NGOs to move beyond CSR’s current limits. New conceptualisations of CSR can contribute to a politics of possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2006) where more ethical and respectful forms of CSR can be practised.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRAJECTORY OF CSR

Initial attempts at practicing CSR were evident in private companies’ charitable actions (Stroup et al., 1987; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). Many companies’ voluntary actions before the twentieth century were influenced by the Aristotelian conception of philanthropy as virtue and charity (Stroup et al., 1987; Sulek, 2010), aligned with Christian values of benevolence and compassion (Brejning, 2012). In a philanthropic approach, socially responsible corporations were expected to donate resources to augment host communities’ health and stability (Heald, 1970). ‘Philanthropy’, within this context, was framed as companies’ voluntary expenditure to support local civil causes (Porter and Kramer, 2002; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988).

Early CSR expressions of American and Western European companies were evident via one-off gifts towards philanthropic causes (Brejning, 2012; Smith, 1994). In the seventeenth century, for instance, CSR was evident in the American economy as charity (Smith, 1994), for example, provision of land and work to the poor and ‘institutions of civilisation’ (p. 7) to the indigenous populations (Bremner, 1988). CSR in western European economies were likewise related to one-off philanthropic activities of the Victorian era. Housing programmes for workers in the industrialisation period is a case in point of philanthropy practices of the Victorian time (Brejning, 2012; Clarke, 1997; Humphreys, 2001).

Although businesses’ concern for host communities can be traced back to the seventeenth century (Smith, 1994), the contemporary ideal of socially responsible businesses emerged in the early post-world-war period of the 1950s (Kiely, 1998, 2007). In many parts of the world, the two post-world-war periods and the Great Recession drastically impacted on the social, political and economic spheres. Destruction and poverty were widespread and the government adopted a central role of welfare provider (Harris, 1992; B. Jessop, 2002; R.D. Jessop, 2002). Within this social milieu, the ideals of welfare liberalism were established.
The ideals underlying welfare liberalism were introduced during the Bretton Woods conference. The Bretton Woods conference was held in July 1944 to regulate the international monetary system and to help post-war countries reconstruct (De Vries, 1996; Sens and Stoett, 2002). Welfare liberalism initially aimed to assist countries’ reconstruction. The welfare state focused on cooperation and social distribution through the state’s regulation (Adams et al., 2000; Harris, 1992; R.D. Jessop, 2002). Within this paradigm, individuals can seek personal economic gains, but ideally without contributing to social inequality.

Welfare liberalism is, nonetheless, a multifaceted phenomenon that embeds myriad contradictory conceptual understandings of the economic, political and ideological organisation of modern society (R.D. Jessop, 2002). This chapter will focus on the core philosophical underpinning of welfare liberalism and its influence upon CSR’s policies and practices. It will not, however, focus on the idiosyncrasies of each type of welfare liberal tradition.

Overall, welfare liberalism introduced the notion of ‘responsibility’ for the materially least advantaged. The welfare paradigm originally expanded the responsibility of the state as the main social welfare provider (Adams et al., 2000; Harris, 1992; R.D. Jessop, 2002). However, it also introduced the idea of a shared ‘responsibility’ with non-state actors in the absence of the state (Brejning, 2012). Non-state actors, such as commercial, non-profit and informal sectors, also became welfare providers under welfare liberalism (Brejning, 2012).

Corporations in Western Europe and North America were, and still are, influenced by this welfare zeitgeist. According to Lorenzo-Molo (2009) a survey conducted in 1946 on what defines a businessman revealed ideals closely related to welfare liberalism. Respondents argued that entrepreneurs have a responsibility towards societies hosting their businesses that went beyond the drive for profit. At a similar time, Bernard Dempsey and Donald K. David, the first academics to formally talk about CSR (Farcane and Bureana, 2015), developed a number of philosophical arguments for CSR, derived from four concepts of justice:

- **Trade justice** — confidence in the trade market; **distributive justice** — proper relationship between government and individuals; **general justice** — accept the legal obligation to act ethically; and **social/distributive justice** — obligation to contribute to the welfare and progress of individuals and society. (Farcane and Bureana, 2015, p. 35, emphasis original)

These four concepts of justice reflect welfare liberal principles of cooperation and social distribution. For instance, the principles of justice that underpin Dempsey and David’s arguments are that (1) people and businesses do not stand alone — rather they need communities to prosper and (2) businesses have the resources and competence to assist with the progress and wellbeing of society and its individuals (Farcane and Bureana, 2015; Gouda et al., 2016).

A few years later, Bowen and Johnson (1953) proposed another definition of CSR that also revealed welfare liberal ideals. Bowen and Johnson (1953) argued that companies must develop policies and make decisions that are in line with
society’s main objectives and values (Carroll, 1999; Lorenzo-Molo, 2009). The 
1950s to mid-1960s constituted the ‘awareness era’ (Carroll, 2008) because cor-
porations began to recognise their responsibilities to local communities.
To illustrate the awareness era, in 1953, the New Jersey Supreme Court 
established that companies could provide grants to not-for-profit organisations 
(Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). This was the first time in the history of United 
States that companies were legally allowed to donate without expecting 
to financially benefit their stakeholders, although donations might have 
achieved this indirectly (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). The time that fol-
lowed the 1950s and 1960s was heavily focused on corporate welfare pro-
grammes for the host society (Crane et al., 2008; Varadarajan and Menon, 
1988). Financially assisting hospitals and community centres were examples of 
how CSR was mostly exercised at that time.
Since the 1970s, the welfare state and CSR have received much criticism. 
According to Kiely (1998, 2007), governments and companies (Friedman, 
2007), following welfare liberal principles, were seen as acting at odds with 
what was called the ‘new globalised capitalism’. Welfare critics have alleged 
that benevolent articulations of welfare liberalism were inherently patriarchal 
(R.D. Jessop, 2002, p. 65). This patriarchal positioning of welfare liberalism 
marginalised certain social groups of society, fostering the dependency of 
derprivileged groups on welfare resources (R.D. Jessop, 2002). Along these 
lines, several companies were criticised for taking a paternalistic approach 
towards their host societies (Harvey and Bice, 2014; Ite, 2004, 2005).
There are prolific examples of companies, mainly multinationals, undertak-
ing paternalistic CSR approach in their host countries. For example, histori-
cally Oil and Gas CSR in Nigeria was mainly developed based on a welfare 
基础 through the Community Assistance programme (Ite, 2004). The commu-
nity assistance programme was mainly focused on providing locals with water 
and sanitation and health care, among other services (Ite, 2004). CSR critics 
claimed that this type of programme revealed a very paternalistic approach 
towards the host community and contributed to locals’ dependency upon CSR 
resources (Ite, 2004).
Another criticism of CSR under a welfare paradigm is that it may create an 
unequal balance of power between the firm and government (Cash, 2012; 
Garriga and Melé, 2004; Hilson, 2012). Studies suggest that CSR, which appro-
priates the government’s role in providing locals with social welfare, might 
provoke a shift in the role of the government from active to passive provider of 
social welfare (Cash, 2012; Frynas, 2005, 2009; Hilson, 2012). Such an imbal-
ance may disrupt nations’ democracies if big corporations hold more power 
than the state in decision-making processes and welfare provisions.
One case of CSR exceeding government expenditure in social welfare is 
illustrated by Harris (1992). According to Harris (1992), during the 1970s, the 
expenditure of private charitable actions greatly exceeded the English govern-
ment’s expenditure on social welfare provision. Such differences promoted an
imbalance of power between private organisations and the government, which disrupted the government’s autonomy to make decisions about social policies at that time.

Business people have also criticised CSR under a welfare tradition (Friedman, 2007). The rationale underlying such criticism refers to the substantial corporate resources CSR draw on without generating profits. From the 1970s onwards, such criticisms aligned with a global market demand for new consumers, systemic and fiscal strengthening and monetary and labour deregulation (King and Wood, 1999). Such demands initiated (1) the crisis of the welfare state (as it was known after the Bretton Woods) and (2) the rise of a new form of liberalism, namely neoliberalism (Adams et al., 2000). Many governments and corporations shifted to adopt neoliberal policies and practices over the remaining three decades of the twentieth century.

Although neoliberalism and welfare liberalism share the same liberal lineage, they differ vastly from each other. Neoliberalism emerged in welfare states mainly as a response to high inflation, a fiscal crisis and high levels of unemployment (R.D. Jessop, 2002; King and Wood, 1999; Nairn et al., 2012).

Neoliberal economic policies were prominent in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher’s government in the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan’s in the United States and Roger Douglas’ in New Zealand (Berg and Roche, 1997; Nairn et al., 2012). Principles of ‘enlightened’ self-interest, economic freedom and profit maximisation reflect neoliberalism’s main principles, which contrasts with welfare liberalism’s focus on cooperation and social distribution (Adams et al., 2000). Neoliberal principles aligned with the new demands placed on national economies due to emerging international markets (Adams et al., 2000; Berg and Roche, 1997).

Under neoliberalism, the free market is the primary driver of the economy so the state has less of a role in protecting the local economy and providing social services (Berg and Roche, 1997; Nairn et al., 2012; Sens and Stoett, 2002). The ‘free market’ refers to a mechanism that is assumed to allocate resources via competition (Adams et al., 2000). Individuals are presumed to be rational subjects whose main desire is to maximise their economic gain, irrespective of any collective interests (Sens and Stoett, 2002). Neoliberal ideas have been criticised for leading to individualist conceptualisations of self-fulfilment that reject the notion of collective goals (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Rose, 1999).

From the 1980s onwards, CSR was influenced by neoliberal notions of ‘enlightened self-interest’ (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988, p. 59), economic freedom, and profit maximisation (Castelló and Lozano, 2011; Friedman, 2007). CSR, under neoliberalism, tended to emphasise companies’ responsibilities as generating a profit for their stakeholders and enhancing competition (Castelló and Lozano, 2011; Friedman, 2007; Suchman, 1995). Profitability was seen as generating jobs which, in turn, engendered wealth, by providing employment for the unemployed (Friedman, 2007; Garriga and Mé, 2004). Through a focus on profit-making, companies were encouraged to strategically provide for new
consumers, including those with few economic resources (Garriga and Melé, 2004).

One example of a neoliberal CSR approach that focuses on new consumers is cause-related markets that target people who engage in social causes. The cause-related market represents a liaison between philanthropy and sales promotion (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). In the cause-related market, corporations’ charitable actions are conditioned by a product or service’s consumption rate: the more a product or service is consumed the more a company donates to a local cause (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). The basic objective of cause-related marketing is to increase the sales of a product or a service. One example of a cause-related market is the Heinz Baby Food Label Saving Program. In this CSR intervention, for each Heinz baby food label mailed by consumers, the Heinz contributed 6 cents to a hospital in the country in the where the consumers reside (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988).

The cause-related market is constructed on the rationale of ‘give-and-give-me-back’ basis or ‘profit-motivating-giving’ (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988, p. 58). CSR projects designed to exchange favours or benefits are fiercely criticised in regards to their appropriateness. Several CSR actors have criticised ‘profit-motivated giving’ by alleging that it refers to a tactical marketing tool, rather than a CSR strategy (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988).

Another criticism of neoliberal approaches to CSR concerns the potential for CSR to act as a form of bribery (Castelló and Lozano, 2011; Hilson, 2012; Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Suchman, 1995). Frynas and Wood (2001) investigated the impacts of CSR on the war in Angola in the 1990s. CSR in Angola, mainly in the extractive industries, often took the form of weapon deals and other forms of assistance to finance the civil war. The study suggests that CSR in Angola was used as a way of channelling money to the Angolan governors to obtain the industries’ protection against civil unrest and a licence to operate (Frynas and Wood, 2001). The war killed over 20,000 people and generated years of suffering and civilian turmoil (James, 2011).

In response to such a crisis, big corporations began shifting their CSR agendas. Companies developed a more hybrid approach towards CSR. The welfare ideal of attending to the collective interest is again endorsed; however, companies were still shaped by a neoliberal focus on profit-making. Human rights and poverty alleviation became the new targets of this hybrid approach as long as

Rethinking CSR in Capitalist Neoliberal Times

33
companies were obtaining high profits and a licence to operate. According to Fleming et al. (2013), this CSR approach has provided companies with ‘ethical discourses’ of corporate behaviour as a way of ensuring that profit-making can proceed, unimpeded (Fleming et al., 2013).

Currently, companies’ CSR policies and practices cannot simply be attributed to welfare or neoliberal ideologies. Instead companies tend to draw on both, implicitly and explicitly, in their CSR policies and practices. CSR, under this hybrid liberal influence, requires companies to balance the benefits gained from business activities, such as profit maximisation, against the financial, social and environmental costs of achieving such benefits (Post et al., 1996). Most companies remain predominantly market oriented within the bounds of these hybrid influences (Blowfield, 2005).

It is therefore not surprising that CSR, shaped by both welfare and neoliberal ideologies, manifests myriad contradictions and tensions when put into practice. These contradictions have led to a profound cynicism about the ideals and activities of CSR, according to Fleming et al. (2013). CSR often reflects a paradox: the more a company proclaims its CSR principles, the more likely cynics interpret this as an indication of a company’s ambition for profit accumulation (Fleming et al., 2013). There are inherent tensions when companies proclaim their ‘duty of care’, whilst still cultivating the ideals of profit accumulation and consumption (Fleming et al., 2013). According to the Fleming et al., CSR is more about adding value to the firm than to the community. They argue that CSR is manipulated by big corporations as an instrument of control and exploitation in the name of profit.

The paradoxes inherent in contemporary understandings of CSR reveal multiple and conflicting political understandings of how companies relate to their host societies. Companies may construct their CSR approach through discourses of collective and/or self-oriented interests, and through profit maximisation and/or social justice. Questioning and investigating these discourses may open up alternative ways of conceptualising CSR which may contribute to new, more respectful and humble forms of CSR.

The next section of this chapter will explore alternative ways of understanding CSR and of creating ‘a politics of possibilities’ (Gibson-Graham, 1997) for CSR, which refers to alternative political and philosophical ways of understanding CSR.

A POLITICS OF POSSIBILITIES FOR CSR

A ‘politics of possibilities’ is a term coined by Gibson-Graham (1997) in their book The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It). Economic geographers, Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson, use the term to explore alternative ways of imagining economic practices outside of capitalism. In this chapter, we borrow
the term ‘politics of possibilities’ to rethink CSR in neoliberal times. When we think of a politics of possibilities, we think of different forms of economic, political and social relations that fall within and outside capitalism. We are aware that companies are embedded in a market-demand paradigm but this paradigm is not universal. The idea that land and labour can be bought — with money or compensatory social programmes — is a concept that, although treated as universal, is very particular to western, liberal values (Blowfield and Frynas, 2005). These values may differ to the expectations workers and locals have of a company’s obligation towards them (Blowfield, 2005). According to Blowfield (2005), capitalist assumptions and values when assumed as universal laws disregards and disrespects certain local and indigenous ways of knowing and interacting with the environment.

When conceiving of a politics of possibilities for CSR, it is vital to consider a politics that falls outside the current forms of liberalism. However, an understanding of corporate–society relations, which are not defined within the liberal paradigm, will potentially be irrelevant to societies whose traditions are mainly capitalist. With this in mind, in the remainder of this chapter, we investigate two ways of understanding corporate–society relations: (1) neocommunitarian liberalism or neocommunitarianism and (2) non-capitalist approaches.

In this chapter, we imagine ourselves agentic in advocating for new ways of thinking about CSR. However, we recognise our limited perspective, as people who have lived, and benefitted from, the welfare liberal/neoliberal economic traditions that we are trying to think beyond (Davies, 1991). So, in endeavouring to advance alternative understandings of CSR, we attempt to think beyond the current status quo, and consider, in practical terms, how CSR professionals and institutions may re-position themselves and CSR.

In the following section, we will explore neocommunitarianism, which is an alternative form of liberal tradition conceptualised by Joseph Schumpeter, an Austrian-born American economist (B. Jessop, 2002). When exploring neocommunitarianism’s main concepts, we will consider how CSR might be conceptualised and practised within this paradigm. We are aware that neocommunitarianism does not entirely reflect our utopic ideal for CSR. However, we do believe that it presents a realistic paradigm that addresses several contemporary CSR issues. Neocommunitarianism may create stepping stones for future practices of CSR that will lead to more genuine and respectful form of companies–communities relations.

Alternative Understandings of CSR

Neocommunitarianism

Neocommunitarianism is built on ideals of mutual responsibility and inclusive communities (Tam, 1998), although it is still located in the market paradigm.
In a neocommunitarian perspective, free competition and profit accumulation should be limited and trade should be fair, and not free (R.D. Jessop, 2002). In this sense, companies, under neocommunitarian principles, should also be guided by moral values, based on human and labour rights and respect for the environment. Principles of sustainability and a global development agenda also accompany such an approach to CSR.

CSR, under neocommunitarianism, would require an alternative approach towards the host society. Some companies already adopt fragments of a neocommunitarian approach. Examples of such CSR initiatives are allegedly community-centred but often focus on a company-centred agenda of profit maximisation. Which means such an approach is not strictly neocommunitarian. This section aims to clarify the key aspects of neocommunitarianism, so that companies may adopt these principles of interacting with people in communities, which go beyond self-interest and profit maximisation as the only corporate motivators.

Neocommunitarian policies support economic redistribution by means of a workfare scheme, instead of a welfare scheme as in welfare liberalism (Eaton, 2008). In these terms, businesses should incorporate communities’ inputs and work-expectations into their business strategies. Neocommunitarians believe that communities’ interests, aligned with businesses’ interests, generate the ‘social economy’ (Eaton, 2008). The social economy happens when members of the community become enterprising subjects who may either create or satisfy market demands.

CSR, according to neocommunitarian principles, should, in fact, recognise the corporation as part of the community, not separate to it. Being part of the community means that business development is only possible through community prosperity and social cohesion. Companies, for instance, should endeavour to either absorb the local labour force, or to partner with other organisations in order to prepare the labour force for market demands.

CSR enmeshed in neocommunitarianism would provoke a paradigm shift from companies interacting with stakeholders to becoming ‘stakeholders’ (Banerjee, 2014). This type of CSR should recognise different actors and focus on developing decentralised partnerships. Corporate initiatives that establish partnerships with the government, NGOs and communities to develop genuine community-oriented approaches to mitigate poverty are examples of how this form of CSR happens in practice.

Approaching CSR through neocommunitarianism may alleviate some of CSR’s current tensions between duty of care and profit maximisation by limiting profit and empowering communities. On the other hand, it may also generate ideological conflicts that cannot always be anticipated. For example, some indigenous societies across the globe whose traditional politics are not based on market relations may not benefit from a neocommunitarian CSR approach. In the following section, we will therefore imagine a non-market form of CSR.
Thinking beyond the ‘Capitalisation’ of Corporate—Society Relations

The alternative tradition we propose here for CSR may not necessarily reject capitalism outright. Rather, it may generate an alternative language of CSR, where profit is not the only driver of corporate practices. This notion would transform our understanding of CSR as an approach to working with/in communities, where communication and relationships are built on a sensibility of openness to otherness, plurality and respect.

In order to imagine an alternative language of CSR, we have to imagine a world order that is different from the one we have inherited (Andreotti and Dowling, 2004). In this sense, we have to exercise seeing and relating to other people without seeing each other solely in economic terms. This means that human relations should not be ‘capitalised’; we should not think about each other in terms of what we get paid and can spend. The ‘product’ of human—corporate relations would focus on collaboration instead of financial gains.

Our starting point when imagining relating to other people outside a perspective focused on financial gains is based on John Roberts’ (2003) critical perspective of CSR. In his view, CSR is currently guided by an accounting/market system. This creates an ethics reversal because instead of people, corporations adopt cost, profit and return on capital as the main categories of their accounting systems (Roberts, 2003). People hardly ever appear in these categories, which create a fiction of the individual. People become a distant sub-product of firms’ operations (Roberts, 2003).

As a result, corporate accountability differs radically from corporate responsibility. Corporate responsibility should entail a corporate body enmeshed in the sensibility of ‘being-in-the-world-with-others’ (Roberts, 2003, p. 252) as an alternative way of understanding the social relations of CSR.

However, CSR, premised on ‘being-in-the-world-with-others’ (Roberts, 2003, p. 252), should also acknowledge it is not possible to fully understand the other (Gibson-Graham, 2003). This requires CSR to build an ethical bond with people by respecting their inherent singularity — not trying to make the other ‘fit in’, or in Andreotti’s (2011) words, ‘domesticate’ the other’s singularity. This means that CSR has to have the capacity to change its approach according to local politics, so that it may genuinely relate with diverse peoples. In this vein, CSR should conceive of human relations as embedded in acts of tolerance and respect (Andreotti and Dowling, 2004).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have investigated the paradoxical understandings of CSR, which have been shaped by neoliberal principles of self-interest and welfare liberal principles of duty of care. We traced how understandings of
CSR have evolved over time, beginning with welfare liberal principles and evolving according to neoliberal imperatives. Our analysis demonstrated how CSR shaped by welfare and neoliberal ideological, political and economic ideas manifest key tensions when put into practice in everyday life. While companies may proclaim a sense of care towards host communities, they are also driven by the ideals of profit accumulation and consumption. In the final sections of the chapter, we demonstrate how the gaps or tensions that exist in current understandings of CSR open up alternative ways of conceptualising CSR.

In the previous sections, we proposed two alternative ways of conceptualising company–society seeing relations that may assist companies, governments and NGOs to move beyond CSR’s current limits. Borrowing the term ‘politics of possibilities’, we proposed a need to rethink CSR by considering different forms of economic, political and social relations that fall both within and outside capitalism. The first was neocommunitarianism, and the second considered how CSR might look if shaped by a focus on plural human relations rather than solely on economic gain. Firstly, we suggested that CSR shaped by neocommunitarianism would re-position the company as one stakeholder among many, as needing to collaborate in genuine ways with other stakeholders, including local communities and environmental advocates, at the highest level. Secondly, CSR shaped by a commitment to ‘being with the other’ would require a shift away from ‘accountability’ understood in relation to cost, profit and return on capital. Instead, this form of CSR would involve a primary focus on (1) people, (2) ‘being-in-relation-to’ other and (3) an acceptance of a plurality of ideas.

All the traditions explored in this chapter relates to capitalism in different ways. In welfare liberalism, CSR approaches communities in a patriarchal way, i.e. companies are the income providers and the communities are the receivers of this welfare. In neoliberalism, CSR approaches communities based on the ‘every individual for themself’ anthem. Profit is personified as an income redistributor in the form of employment. In neocommunitarianism, CSR approaches communities systemically. In this approach, income is ideally created by the mutual efforts of different actors. In this chapter, we consider neocommunitarianism a stepping-stone for implementing CSR that prioritises people, instead of income.

Finally, in endeavouring to propose diverse ways for CSR to approach human relations, we hope to contribute to ‘a culture of openness that would support processes in which new forms of relationships and agency can develop and be nurtured’ (Andreotti and Dowling, 2004, p. 612). We hope that this chapter serves as a starting point from which companies and CSR experts can build on more creative and ethical approaches to CSR, which promote positive futures for all people, rather than short-term gain for a few.
NOTES

1. We are using capitalism and neoliberalism interchangeably. Although they differ in meaning, in the current context, we refer to capitalism as a mainly based on neoliberal or classical liberal premises of market ideals of inherently self-interested individuals, free market and competition.

2. Tam (1998) talks about the communitarianism principles of mutual responsibility and inclusive communities. For our alternative conceptualisation of CSR we will consider the same principles for neocommunitarianism.

REFERENCES


Rethinking CSR in Capitalist Neoliberal Times