

Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility in Global Production Networks***Dr. Farah Naz, Dr. **Dieter Boegenhold****Abstract**

The article is part of an emerging South-centred critical perspective on corporate social responsibility (CSR). Despite growing academic interest in critical CSR, the existing literature is relatively silent on gendered outcomes of CSR practices. This article intends to fill this gap in the CSR literature by initiating a conversation about the dynamics of gender and CSR approaches in global supply chains with particular reference to the Global South by providing a specific institutional context of CSR for reflection. Empirically, the research focuses on a region in Pakistan where a large number of female home-based workers stitch footballs for Western brands. The findings are based on a qualitative study that unpacks the complexities of CSR in Global Production Networks (GPNs) and reflects on the unintended negative consequences that arise when gender-blind CSR approaches are uncritically envisaged and implemented in the Global South. The study reasserts the need for broader and more inclusive CSR approaches in GPNs. The authors suggest that contextualized and gendered CSR approaches are necessary to improve labour conditions in international supply chains.

Key Words: Corporate Social Responsibility; Gender; Global Production Networks; Social Reproduction; Global South; Human Relations

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Introduction

There are many reasons that have led to the prominence of CSR in academia in recent years, the business world and consumers' everyday lives, growing consumer pressure and concern about the environmental impact of business operations, poor business behaviour towards workers along the extended supply chains of global corporations, and increased awareness and investigative journalism being but a few of them. According to Carroll and Brown (2018), the cumulative effect of all of these factors has been an increased awareness in consumers about unfair institutional practices, especially in businesses, which ultimately changed the focus of CSR discussions from assuming responsibility to demanding responsiveness (Adeyeye, 2011). According to Carroll (2021) the *revolution of rising expectations* that marked the 21st century has resulted in a growing concern about corporate image and responsibility. As Matten and Moon (2020) noted, CSR provides a means to secure a desired legitimacy within a specific institutional context. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that corporations adopt CSR to gain, maintain, or repair their legitimacy. However, the tension between economic and social good has always occupied a central but uneasy position in the stream of literature that is the outcome of a particular corporate rationality based on neoliberal ideological and political assumptions about the role of business in society.

Existing empirical studies on CSR in global supply chains have explored a variety of topics, such as CSR and governance (Bair and Palpacuer, 2015), social upgrading in clusters and chains (Gereffi and Lee, 2016), human rights (Giuliani, 2016), CSR and the social contract (Knorringa and Nadvi, 2016), and working conditions in supply chains (Lund-Thomsen and Nadvi, 2010; Soundararajan^[1] and Brown, 2016). Although this emerging South-centred critical perspective on corporate social responsibility (CSR) has already provided rich insights into the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream CSR practices in developing countries, there is still much work to be done to understand the gender dynamics of CSR. Existing research on CSR in global production networks (GPNs) has not paid heed to the potentially gendered outcomes of CSR in developing countries (Grosser and Moon, 2019).

Building on the knowledge gained from this wealth of literature on CSR practices in GPNs (Bair and Palpacuer, 2015; Lund-Thomsen, 2019; Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen, 2014; 2018) and a feminist perspective on CSR (Bhattacharya, 2017; Bezanson and Luxton, 2006; Grosser and Moon, 2019; Spence, 2016) we seek to shed light on this blind spot of CSR. More specifically, in this paper we argue that although existing CSR approaches, in principle, recognize the responsibilities of business towards the community and society at large, much of the discussion on CSR is gender blind and narrow in focus. This study is unique as it sets out to investigate how CSR programmes designed to benefit workers might actually hurt the interests of women workers, particularly when CSR in GPNs serves the purpose of legitimizing and consolidating the power of large corporations. The aim of our discussion in this article is to address CSR strategies within global supply chains in the socioeconomic and regional contexts of non-Western countries. CSR schemes are part of management tools aiming at economic developments worldwide, and they must be analysed as elements of an integrative framework (Johnstone-Luis, 2017). At least, they have effects on labour processes, and especially on those of female labourers (Billo, 2020; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Karam and Jamali, 2017). Our goal was to investigate CSR practices in global supply chains by deploying critical insights gained from the growing discussion

about gender and CSR (Karam and Jamali, 2017; McCarthy 2017; Spence, 2016). To achieve this goal, this research focuses on home-based work¹ in the football industry in Pakistan. One major objective of this study is to explore how female home-based workers perceive and experience the existing CSR practices and frameworks adopted by image-conscious football brands in Sialkot, Pakistan. In this regard we focused exclusively on one specific issue, namely the ban on home-based work in the Sialkot cluster that was imposed by image-conscious international brands to remove the scandalous taint on their brand image due to allegations of poor working conditions and the prevalence of child labour in football supply chains.

1. Global Supply Chains, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Female Work in the Global South

According to different estimations, global supply chains comprise an increasingly large part of global world trade, redefining the mode of economic development (Milanovic, 2019). A way of organizing production such that different stages are located in different countries, global supply chains are probably the most important organizational innovation in this era of globalization. They were made possible both by the technological ability to control production processes effectively from distant locations and by global respect for property rights (Milanovic, 2019, 147-148). It is estimated that they add up to 60% of international production and even up to 80% of international trade (ITUC, 2016).

An investigation of global social inequalities reveals strong interdependencies between production and living conditions in peripheral world regions on the one hand and industrial centres of capitalist economies and trade in Western regions on the other. A huge proportion of economic activity in less developed countries is carried out on behalf of established brand companies from Europe and North America. Low wages, hazardous work, and unhealthy living conditions in the countries of production allow the West to consume many forms of food, textiles, and other everyday products.

Problems with global supply chains can illustrate the need to think in interlacing modes and to learn to understand the limits of mono-disciplinary approaches. The link between interdependencies in international cooperation, the fragility and vulnerability of global supply chains, and, of course, the limitations of our intellectual order of thought, which often ignores the need for thinking outside the box, ought to be explored in relational perspectives (Girschik et al., 2020; Gond and Moser, 2021; Noronha et al., 2020). Processes of globalization can only be seen and analysed through multiple lenses which combine approaches from different disciplines. Naz and Bögenhold (2020) have shown how production processes in developing countries are related to Western companies as well as the everyday consumption habits of individuals who do not care about the production processes of goods supplied by distant regions on different continents.

Although there is a theoretical consensus that business organizations should be held accountable for any of their actions which affect people and communities as well as the environment in which these people or communities live (Amoako, 2016), little empirical or analytical attention has been paid to the informal labourers employed at the tail end of GPNs in the context of global standards or codes of conduct (Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Carswell and De Neve, 2013). In developing countries, due to the overwhelmingly large

¹ Home-based work is a form of sub-contracted work that is mainly performed by women in their homes and paid on a piece-rate basis.

proportion of the informal economy and a lack of legal protection for informal workers, the implementation of labour standards is mostly limited to the formal labour force and the vast majority of the informal labour force have experienced little or no change in their working conditions (De Neve, 2012). In order to address these issues, the literature needs to redress this imbalance of perspective through active engagement with the diverse social environments in which the female labour force participates in the Global South.

2. **Gendering the Analysis of CSR in Global Production Networks**

According to Yeung and Coe (2015), global production networks are “organizational arrangements comprising interconnected economic and non-economic actors coordinated by a global lead firm and producing goods or services across multiple geographical locations for worldwide markets” (p. 3). GPNs are dynamic in nature and involve a wide range of actors with diverse interests and priorities occupying different places in the hierarchy of power relations that characterizes GPNs. These power relations are not unidirectional and they involve both vertical and horizontal relations. Vertical relations refer to the power relations between buyers and suppliers whereas horizontal network relations range from formal rules and regulations to informal norms (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen, 2018).

Existing research indicates that CSR approaches in GPNs have not paid sufficient attention to issues of gender and social reproduction (Barrientos, 2013, 2019). Grosser and Moon (2019) illustrate how grounding CSR approaches in feminist theory can contribute to CSR research. The limitations of CSR practices in GPNs are more pronounced in the case of female home-based workers. As discussed earlier, despite a growing theoretical consensus that business organizations have responsibilities towards the communities and societies where they operate (Amoako, 2016; Karam and Jamali, 2017), relatively less is known about informal labour force actively engaged at bottom end of GPNs (Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Carswell and De Neve, 2013). Due to the overwhelmingly large proportion of the informal economy and a lack of legal protection for informal workers, the implementation of CSR in developing countries is mostly limited to the formal labour force, with the vast majority of the informal labour force experiencing little or no change in their working conditions (De Neve, 2012; Fayyaz, 2011). Existing instrumental CSR approaches have a limited capacity to ensure systematic improvement in working conditions at the lower end of GPNs (Beddewela and Fairbrass, 2015). This is especially relevant in the case of developing countries, where the role of CSR in social and economic development is limited (Blowfield, 2007).

The existence of multiple stakeholders at the nexus of globalization vs. localization has raised questions about the legitimacy of various stakeholders and how CSR should be judged in response to varied and differentiated stakeholder environments. Although the existing CSR practices of image-conscious international brands do not acknowledge home workers (Delaney et al., 2016), it is clear that their categorical omission in GPNs is no longer legitimate as they are important stakeholders and should no longer be invisible. Existing feminist literature focusing on gender, stakeholders, and global corporations also emphasizes the need to incorporate the voices of women workers in discussions around CSR (Prieto-Carrón, 2004, 2006). Feminist work, particularly in the field of development studies and political economics, provides rich insights into the impact of CSR on gender equality.

3. Home-Based Work at the Crossroads of Production and Social Reproduction

The increased participation of women in the informal economy through outsourcing arrangements has gone hand in hand with cuts in government support for social reproduction. Under pressure from neoliberal policy regimes, many developing countries have rolled back their state services in many important sectors. Such policies are based on the unrealistic assumption that women's supply of unpaid labour is infinitely elastic (Elson, 1999) and that they will automatically take over responsibility for the provision of services previously provided by the state. However, such recommendations proposed by global governance institutes such as the IMF and the World Bank have increased the burden of care work for women within their households. Female home-based workers, who are working at the intersection of production and social reproduction, have to stretch themselves to the limit to bear the paid and unpaid responsibilities of care work. Home-based work is a unique form of work which combines paid work performed within the private sphere of the household with industrial production. Home-based work that takes place within the private sphere of the household is often not acknowledged legally and tends to represent an invisible form of work in GPNs. Although there has been some improvement over the past few years, CSR approaches in GPNs (Barrientos, 2013, 2019) continue to fall short of goals set by feminist social reproduction theory (Bergeron, 2011). Social reproduction theory (SRT) focuses on the complex social processes and human relations that are required to produce and sustain labour power for the capitalist system of production organization. Social reproduction theorists criticize that the tremendous amount of familial and communitarian work that is needed to produce workers has been naturalized into non-existence (Bhattacharya, 2017). Consequently, it is invisible in classical mainstream economic theory and policy discourse.

Thus SRT re-poses the question of production in relation to the production of the labour force itself, which includes biological reproduction, generational reproduction, and daily social reproduction. Biological reproduction involves the process of creating human life while generational reproduction refers to the work required to rear and care for children until they are able to take care of themselves and are ready to enter the labour market. Unpaid care work performed by women for daily social reproduction ensures that an individual's labour power is ready for the next day's work. Social reproduction also involves the reproduction of institutions and ideologies, which ensures the continuation of the socio-economic organization of society. It is noteworthy that, despite the fact that GPNs capitalize on the female labour force as a central part of their competitive strategies, the interests and preferences of women workers are not incorporated in CSR practices. This is particularly important from the perspective of the Global South where public provision for the social reproduction of labour such as income support, child benefits, general health support, and access to free education is either deficient or non-existent so the cost of the social reproduction of labour has to be covered privately. To date, debates on the implications of CSR for women workers have been narrowly focused on the experiences of women in the labour market while issues of social reproduction have failed to carve out the space they deserve in these discussions.

4. Research method

The empirical data utilized for this article are from a larger case study that was conducted by the authors to explore what is happening with regard to the institution of home-based work in terms of “good” and “bad” jobs (Kalleberg, 2011) in the global production system and the division of international employment. This study was strongly embedded in a social constructivist framework, which was used to understand the lived realities of female home-based workers in global production networks. The foundation of social constructivism as a research paradigm was prepared by works such as Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality* and Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry* and more recent publications include Crotty (1998), Lincoln and Guba (2000). The underlying assumption in social constructivism is that meaning is varied and complex, and individuals seek to understand the world in which they live by developing a subjective meaning of their experience. Therefore, it is pointed out tellingly in constructionist views that meanings are not *discovered* but *constructed*. Constructionism holds that meanings are constructed in the process of human engagement with the world. These subjective meanings develop through historical and cultural norms arising in and through a process of interaction with others in their respective life settings.

The existentialist concept of the human as being interwoven with the phenomenological concept of intentionality espouses an epistemology that cannot simply be categorized as objective or subjective. Rather, objectivity and subjectivity are brought together precisely in constructionism, but indissolubly so. The constructionist claims to construct meaning and works with the objects within the world. Thus, a reconstructed understanding of the social world is a main goal that replaces traditional criteria of internal and external validity with trustworthiness and authenticity that is not absolutist but derived from community consensus. Meaning is constructed by the activities of individuals or groups and these meaning-making activities are the prime focus of social constructivists.

A combination of methods such as observation, focus group discussions, and interviews were used to collect the empirical data. The qualitative case study method is a useful reflexive approach to understand the situated realities (Creswell, 2009; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Yin, 1981). The data used for this particular paper were gathered in ten in-depth interviews and informal conversation with thirty female home-based workers. We selected our interview partners purposively based on the criteria of age, gender, work experience, and marital status. Several unstructured interviews were also conducted with other members of the stitching community (such as members of non stitching households) to gain access to our research setting. These interviews exceeded the length of conventional interviews and took place in multiple sessions. “How” questions were used in the qualitative interviews to help obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under observation.

All our interviews were organized by a gatekeeper and conducted by one of the authors in the local language at the home-based workers’ homes. Command on local language and shared gender identity helped to build a trust relationship with respondents. Our data were made up of interview transcripts, detailed field notes based on observations, and memos, which were then transcribed and coded. After line-by-line coding, major themes were identified using analytical strategies from grounded theory (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program, was used in the data analysis.

6. The Context of the Case

The football industry has a long history in Sialkot, Pakistan, which is known for the production of good quality, hand-stitched balls (Khan et al., 2010; Lund-Thomsen et al., 2012). Traditionally, football production was organized on a quasi-cottage-based system and male football stitchers stitched tough leather balls. However, after the 1970s, a technological upgrade for punching holes and the introduction of synthetic leather led to the induction of female labour into the industry. In the sphere of football production, Sialkot is a famous name and footballs are produced here for major brands like Adidas, Nike, Puma, Select, Litto, Umbro, Mitre, Micassa, Diadora, and Decathlon. Sialkot caters for 85 percent of the total world demand for hand stitched inflatable balls, which adds up to 60 million balls annually. However, the reputation of Sialkot was tarnished by allegations of practices of child labour in the football industry that became a global issue following the broadcast, on 6 April 1995, of a CBS news documentary on the football industry in Sialkot (Khan et al., 2007). This news was quickly picked up by the media worldwide and global consumer pressure mounted for remedial action to be taken.

The threat to business also led Sialkot industrialists to sign the Atlanta Agreement in 1997, facilitated by the other three signatories—the ILO, UNICEF, and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Consequently, an exemplary collaborative venture was launched to rid the football industry of child labour and a new production regime was introduced. To ensure the elimination of child labour and the monitoring of labour practices in production facilities, home-based production was banned in the football industry to be replaced by factories and stitching centres. However, the exclusive focus on the issue of child labour and the way it was framed in a seemingly benign manner created a *velvet curtain* (Khan et al., 2007, p. 1056) that obscured other crucial conditions and consequences, especially for stitchers in the industry, who are important but weak stakeholders in the hierarchy of power relations in the organization of football production. The impact of the ban on child labour and associated changes in the organization of production gradually unfolded over the years, with the exclusion of the voices of the stitching community from debates about the reorganization of work in the football industry having both social and moral implications. The case of the football industry in Pakistan raises serious questions concerning who has the right to define the il/legitimacy of a certain business practice.

There is extensive literature on the football industry in Pakistan that covers a wide range of issues, such as child labour (F.R. Khan, 2004, 2010), labour rights (Hussain-Khaliq, 2004; Siegmann, 2008), labour agency (Lund-Thomsen, 2013; Lund-Thomsen and Coe, 2015), global value-chain linkages and local CSR approaches (Lund-Thomsen and Nadvi, 2010), technological upgrading and labour standards (Nadvi, 2011; Nadvi et al., 2011; Scamardella, 2015), comparative work conditions (Lund-Thomsen et al., 2012), and the impact of donor-financed CSR projects in Sialkot (Fayyaz et al., 2017). The list of existing literature shows that female home-based workers who constitute the broad majority of football stitchers, are not fully acknowledged in labour rights and labour agencies. McCarthy (2017) emphasized the need to get closer to people's hopes, desires, and experiences within CSR initiatives. These female home-based workers located at the cross-section of production and social reproduction have their own constructs of social reality that flow from the relation between their productive and reproductive work. The local gendered institutional framework and their personal experiences within that system

shape their worldview. An existing dearth of literature on female home-based work adds to the importance of this research. We intend to explore how social compliance demands, such as the prohibition of home-based work in Sialkot, impact the living and working conditions of female football stitchers in Sialkot.

7. Home-Based Work and Corporate Social (Ir-)Responsibility: Major Findings and Discussions

The qualitative data analysed for this paper revealed that the female football stitchers contacted during the fieldwork prefer home-based football stitching over other work arrangements. They choose to work from home as it allows them to combine it with their unpaid care work that includes taking care of children and elderly family members. One of our respondents, Zara (not her real name), explained how her family situation led her to choose home-based football stitching:

My sisters-in-law who work in the centre brought home some work from their centre and I started working with them at home and gradually I learned to stitch footballs. I was responsible for all the household work in my in-laws' home. [...] My daughters were small. They sat with me and I stitched footballs at home. So I could not go to the stitching centre for work (Source: excerpt from interview).

The interdependencies of markets, institutions, and ideologies have often been highlighted by feminist scholarship (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Labour choices and conditions cannot be understood in isolation but must be interpreted in a context of social and economic institutions of space, culture, and specific societies. Contextualizing research by broadening perspectives of investigation (Welter and Baker, 2021) helps to improve a better theoretical understanding of economic and social phenomena under consideration. The aim is to acknowledge human research and management research and practice within a broader perspective of the spectrum of social sciences and the interaction of different areas (Bögenhold, 2021).

Indeed, social factors led all of our respondents to opt for home-based work. Due to the existing normative structure and ideologies, women in Pakistan are responsible for unpaid care work in their homes. Therefore, women often consider home-based football stitching as the most viable form of income-earning opportunities because working from home provides them with the required flexibility:

I get up early in the morning around 6 am and prepare breakfast for my son and husband. Then I do other household work like cleaning, dish washing, etc. Around 10 am I start stitching footballs and mostly work till 4pm. Then I cook a meal for my family. After that I continue stitching footballs. I usually work till 10 or 11 pm. As I have a backache problem, it is hard for me to sit for a long time, so I have to take a short break after every three or four hours. (home worker)

In order to work in factories and stitching centres, they would have to travel to other places. However, existing public transport facilities and infrastructure, especially in rural areas of Pakistan, are very poor, which makes women even more vulnerable. According to Kang (2021), in order to introduce better practices in global supply chains, the role of local contexts and institutional frameworks must be acknowledged (De Neve, 2012). The lack of appropriate transport facilities and the cultural norms of Pakistani society that restrict women's mobility and demand gender segregation in the public sphere have constrained

women's access to stitching centres. Therefore, women consider home-based football stitching as a valuable income earning opportunity for themselves and their families. As it does not defy the social norms of Pakistani society, home-based football stitching used to have wider social acceptance and approval, as narrated by Asia:

Working from home has more advantages. As you know, both boys and girls work together in factories, then it's not good. That is why my family does not like us to go to the factories to work. We have to work at home, no matter if it's more or less, or even if we die due to starvation. (Source: excerpt from interview)

Football stitching in Pakistan is organized at three levels: factory-based, centre-based, or home-based. Factory-based stitching has more formal work arrangements and workers have a formal contract relationship with their employer. However, centre-based and home-based stitching centres do not provide employment contracts to workers. The imposition of the ban on home-based football stitching by major football brands under GPNs governance pressure, thus, created difficulty for those women stitchers who are not able to travel to stitching centers due to their personal life circumstances and prevailing sociocultural conditions. The ban on home-based work by global brand name companies from the North demanded a cultural change regarding the organization of work in the Global South that created explicit tensions in stitchers' communities. In terms of women's access to paid work, the shift to stitching centres and factory-based production had the unintended effect of female exclusion from production as documented in many other studies as well (A. Khan, 2007; F.R. Khan, 2007; Lund-Thomson and Nadvi, 2010). As pointed by Grosser and Moon (2019) the marginalization of women's voices on the ground and in academic work is a serious limitation of current CSR literature.

Only 20 percent of the female stitching labour force has succeeded in migrating from the home to stitching centres. Many women prefer to work from home or to not work at all, despite their precarious economic situation. The narratives of our respondents revealed that they refuse to work at centres for many reasons, including cultural norms of female seclusion, obligations of their unpaid care work in the home, or because their menfolk have not given them permission to commute to work. As Nadia reported, *my family does not like us to go to the factories to work. We have to work at home. (Source: excerpt from interview)* It can be safely concluded from the narrative data that the imposition of the ban has not only reduced the income of female home-based workers and their families (F.R. Khan, 2007), it has also changed perceptions of male stitchers about their work. This was also reflected in a conversation with a male football stitcher, who expressed his plight thus:

I am now 40 years old and I started stitching footballs at the age of 15 as part of my family tradition. However, over the years, the value of this work has decreased due to the low income. It is no longer as socially valuable as it used to be in the past when I started this work. People now call us "Footballia". I want to leave this work and want to work as a house painter as that is relatively well paid but I cannot leave this work. (homeworker)

Due to the restriction on home-based work by all major brands, it became an illegitimate activity in the area, further pushing down the wages of those female stitchers who prefer to work from their homes. Consequently, there was a further decline in family income reported by those home-based workers. A critical examination of the outcome of corporate legitimacy-seeking strategies in the Sialkot cluster clearly indicates that a narrow

and instrumental version of CSR that dominates corporate rationality fails to acknowledge the interests and priorities of home-based workers (Banerjee, 2014). This also demonstrates the need for a much broader and more inclusive sense of corporate responsibility as emphasised by Pearson (2007) in her critique on corporate (in)action in particular circumstances.

Women's roles as paid workers and homemakers are shaped by their gender and other socio-special markers such as age, marital status, and caste (Boeri, 2018). Female football stitchers not only contribute to the global economy but also take care of the reproductive needs of their families and communities in order to produce future generations of workers. Home-based workers use their income for social reproduction.

This was my father's will that all of his daughters get an education, because we have just one brother who is younger. But when I looked at the family's condition I left school.... I just desired that our family conditions would change and we would have good things to eat and drink (expression for a good diet)... My dream was to have a good house, our house should have a good environment, have good food and clothing and I desire that my father stays well. Just these were my desires and I have no other desire... (Source: Excerpt from interview)

Women often narrate proudly that their income enabled them to educate their children. The CSR intervention introduced in the Sialkot cluster, supposedly to improve working conditions, had negative consequences for the female home-based workers actively engaged in maintaining the existing labour supply and producing the next generation of labour for the market economy (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The majority of female home-based stitchers work full time to support their families as income from all other sources is falling in their community. Our findings indicate that despite the exploitative nature of their work, the income earned by home-based workers is important for the subsistence of their families. Although they are not satisfied with their work, the possibility of protesting against unfair wages is muted due to their dire economic need and the unavailability of alternatives.

The case of the football industry is a vivid illustration of the issue raised by feminist researchers that CSR practices generally focus on instrumental considerations and neglect the gender aspect (Pearson, 2007). Home-based workers clearly contradict the claims of genuine CSR, a notion that demands social responsibility towards the production and social reproduction of women's labour. Seen from the perspective of the social reproduction of labour, it is logical to extend CSR to female home-based workers as legitimate stakeholders in global supply chains and to incorporate women workers in decision-making processes related to CSR.

This clearly demonstrates the need for more comprehensive CSR approaches informed by feminist economic lenses that acknowledge that labour markets are gendered institutions, reflections of socially constructed gender divisions of labour within which global supply chains operate. According to the analytical framework proposed by SRT, the concerns of women workers are different from men. As already mentioned, as part of their gender role obligations, women are responsible for unpaid care work such as domestic chores and taking care of the young and elderly members of the family within the domestic sphere. However, such kinds of reproductive work, although playing a very important role in sustaining a capitalist system of production, are not only beyond the coverage of CSR

but are not even acknowledged. The imposition of the ban on home-based work without even consulting home-based workers points towards the inherent weakness of current CSR approaches. The case study of the football industry indicates that the provision of social protection to workers on the invisible margins of supply chains through CSR seems a remote possibility albeit a necessity to improve labour conditions in supply chains. Our empirical data indicate that business profits from the local system of social reproduction flow uphill to richer companies, social actors, and regions (Stiglitz, 2003). The overarching presence of global supply chains is a mirror of global capitalism and many observers see the existence of global supply chains as an advantage rather than a disadvantage for further economic development. They attract more capital, newly incoming international firms, and new markets as well as signalling trust for business transactions (Milanovic, 2019). However, they also include hazards, potential dependencies, and new forms of social exclusion, vulnerability, and precarity, if not slavery (Caspersz et al., 2022).

8. Concluding Remarks

The many diverse developments which led, over the last hundred years, to the recent firm establishment of capitalism can no longer be considered in black and white in a normative view but rather as complex, contradictory issues which are more difficult to analyse in terms of a beginning or end, in terms of being “good” or “bad”. Capitalism has changed from a bi-polar orchestration with two power foci to a complex puzzle which is permanently in the process of being reconfigured. At first sight, corporate social responsibility is faced with a rapid evolution in the debate about ethical concerns. “Doing good” is seemingly not only an ethical motive to arrive at a more sustainable world but also one to polish one’s corporate brand positively. Despite considerable progress in the discussion (McWilliams et al. 2019; Haynes et al. 2013; Idowu et al. 2020,), we can still see the limitations in our current knowledge balancing ethical intentions and negative outcomes, often unintendedly (Merton, 1936) and sometimes even intentionally, in favour of profit. CSR traversed the globe, initiated by Western companies as a kind of imperialism (Khan and Lund-Thomsen, 2011), and has proven to have both positive aspects but also many dark sides (Pisani et al., 2017, Soundararajan, 2018). Even when we know about CSR’s impact on the businesses themselves as well as the challenges, benefits, and hazards for businesses, we often observe a lack of information on how major societal issues are addressed (or even not addressed). Asking in a contextual perspective for different facets and lenses and the interplay of the when, where, how, why, and by whom questions provides a complex picture, which looks more like a jungle than a source for clear answers. Moreover, critical research shows that under the ethical flag of doing socially well, societal issues are often neglected or harmed (McCarthy, 2017).

Very often, local contexts and their social embeddedness are not systematically taken into account as autonomous fields of reasoning and rationality (Alamgir and Banerjee, 2019). Especially when it comes to the gendered consequences of CSR strategies, it turns out that ethical concerns which were initiated by some well-intended strategies result in opposite effects. Cause-and-effect relations are often not anticipated carefully, especially not when it comes to “gendered lenses” and international relations.

The empirical results portrayed in this article which are based on the case of football production in Pakistan carried out by female home-based workers provide evidence of contradictory and mostly ambivalent relationships between CSR strategies developed by well-known Western brands and the real (female) life-world in small places in developing

countries, too divergent are the claims of brand authenticity at the one end and the social, economic, and legal consequences of female workers at the other end.

Much of the existing literature on corporate social responsibility is built on a notion of responsibility that is limited to the public sphere of work whereas, contrary to this, business also operates in the private spheres of homes through extended supply chains. Particular attention should be paid to these marginalized sites of production dominated by a female labour force. The localized and situated experiences of home-based workers and how they engage with or contest international social compliance regimes can bring new insights into our understanding of the social responsibilities of business in an increasingly globalized world.

Disclosure statement

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