MUNK SCHOOL BRIEFINGS

Comparative Program on Health and Society

Edited by Lisa Forman and Laurie Corna

The Corporatization of Sport, Gender and Development: Postcolonial IR Feminisms, Transnational Private Governance and Global Corporate Social Engagement

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By
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The Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto seeks to be an internationally recognised leader in interdisciplinary academic research on global issues and to integrate research with teaching and public education. We place special emphasis on the fostering of innovative interdisciplinary knowledge through the exchange of ideas and research among academics as well as the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

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Abstract

Across the globe, the “Girl Effect” is a growing but understudied initiative that assumes that girls are catalysts capable of bringing social and economic change to their families, communities and countries. In an attempt to build on the “promise” of women as agents of development, there has been escalating interest in sport, gender, and development (SGD) interventions that aim to “empower” women and girls in the Two-Thirds World through sport and play. Increasingly, SGD interventions are funded and implemented by multinational corporations (MNCs). Drawing on postcolonial feminist international relations theory and recent literature on transnational private governance, the purpose of this study was to consider how MNCs headquartered in the One-Third World that fund, execute and implement corporate-sponsored SGD programs in the Two-Thirds World are implicated in some of the complicated effects observed in the postcolonial contexts in which they operate. Qualitative research methods were used, including interviews with seven key staff members from a sporting goods MNC that funds SGD programs in the Two-Thirds World. The findings revealed three themes that speak to the colonial residue within corporate-funded SGD interventions, including 1) the power of brand authority, 2) the importance of “authentic” subaltern stories, and 3) the politics of the “global sisterhood” enmeshed in saving “distant” others. The implications of these findings for SGD will be discussed in terms of postcolonial feminist approaches to studying sport for development and peace more generally.

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List of Acronyms

GCSE – Global Corporate Social Engagement
SGD – Sport, Gender, and Development
MNC – Multinational Corporation
CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

In June 2007, Right To Play – a prominent international sport for development and peace non-governmental organization (NGO) – partnered with Adidas to sell a “limited edition” of the signature Right To Play mini
red ball that has since been sold in Adidas stores worldwide and on adidas.com (Right To Play 2007). All proceeds from the sale of the mini red ball ($10 USD each) have been used to support Right To Play’s projects in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. In the words of Right To Play CEO Johann Koss, the corporate-NGO partnership was significant for engaging consumers as “buying this special mini ball children in this country (the US) can give the gift of laughter, hope and health to children in need around the world” (Right To Play 2007). Right To Play’s partnership with Adidas is not unique, as it has partnered with other multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Microsoft. Indeed, the involvement of MNCs as powerful actors in providing aid, professional support, and authority over development projects holds important implications that, with few exceptions (e.g., Giardina 2010; Levermore 2010), have yet to be empirically examined in sport for development and peace. This lack of exploration is surprising, given the UN’s recent endorsement of private sector involvement in funding, leading, and supporting the Sport for Development and Peace movement (United Nations 2006).

While traditional philanthropic actors such as NGOs, faith-based entities and international organizations such as the UN continue to play an important role in addressing the pressing global concerns encompassed by the UN Millennium Development Goals, the roles of MNCs are becoming increasingly pertinent in funding, creating, and governing international development interventions (Ponte, Richey and Babb 2009). This is part of a growing trend in donor logic, and in many ways, the influence of MNCs, high-powered businessmen and celebrities (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) on aid priorities are often entirely detached from governments’ foreign policy objectives (Steiner-Khamsi 2008). In this way, as MNCs continue to use development interventions to demonstrate their “socially responsible” platforms, the potential for public relations campaigns to make development aid “sexy” and “branded” by celebrities to enhance corporate images, has meant that new modalities of aid are being created (Cameron and Haanstra 2008). As Steiner-Khamsi (2008) suggests, these donors see themselves as “cosmopolites representing global capital and a global community rather than their governments…they give as they please with little regard for the heated debates in development work” (Steiner-Khamsi 2008, 13).

Yet there are concerns that this new form of global corporate social engagement (GCSE) is not only ineffective, but also harmful for development, including those interventions that focus on the health of women and girls. While recent research has documented the rising involvement of MNCs in international development, the focus on “the girl” as a key agent (or instrument) of development has simultaneously emerged as a notable trend (Roy 2007). In many ways, the idea that girls hold the answer to the development problems of our time has been driven by the “Girl Effect” movement, a growing but understudied initiative that assumes that girls are catalysts capable of bringing “unparalleled social and economic change to their families, communities and countries” (UN Foundation 2010). Over the past decade, there have been a growth in sport for development interventions implemented and funded by the private sector, governments, and NGOs that specifically target women and girls in the Two-Thirds World (Hayhurst et al., 2011). In this way, the Girl Effect holds profound implications for sport, gender, and development (SGD) programs and/or interventions that focus on using physical activity and sport to promote gender equality, challenge gender norms, teach healthy living, confidence and leadership skills, disseminate HIV/AIDS preventative education, and improve women’s and girls’ control over fertility, while contributing to their overall health (Hayhurst et al., 2011).

This paper offers a partial response to growing concerns about the (un)intended effects of corporate sponsored gender-focused health and physical activity interventions centred on the Girl Effect premise. Specifically, this study draws on empirical research conducted with a MNC from the sporting industry involved in executing, funding, and implementing SGD programs around the world. Through this study, I respond to recent arguments put forth by scholars who suggest that corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in sport for development and peace “lack engagement at best, or are examples of “‘greenwash strategy’ at worst” (Levermore 2010, 236). To do this, I combine literature on transnational private governance (Cutler 2010) with postcolonial feminist international relations theory (Ling 2002) and research on corporate social responsibility in international development (Khan, Westwood and Boje 2010) to argue that GCSE is used as a technology of governmentality by MNC through its recent SGD interventions targeted
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at girls in the Two-Thirds World. I also build on the work of Khan et al. (2010) by arguing that MNCs headquartered in the One-Third World that fund, execute and implement corporate-sponsored SGD programs in the Two-Thirds World must be scrutinized through the postcolonial contexts in which they operate. In particular, I suggest that exploring the unintended effects and power relations imbued through the subject positions of CSR staff members (mostly based in the One-Third World) working on behalf of MNCs operating SGD interventions in the Two-Thirds World helps to show how the possibly benevolent intentions of MNCs obscure the global inequalities and intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation that are exacerbated within the postcolonial conditions that exist in the Two-Thirds World.

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sport for Development and Peace, SGD and GCSE

For more than a decade, sport has been formally institutionalized and recognized on the development agenda by the international community, most notably by the UN in 2005, which was hailed as the UN International Year of Sport and Physical Education (UN, 2006). Since 2001, with the inception of the mandate of the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, the UN has held various annual conferences, meetings, and workshops under the sport for development and peace banner. Currently, the International Platform on Sport and Development (the hub and on-line coordinating body for the movement) promotes close to 300 sport for development and peace projects on its website (www.sportanddev.org).

The fundamental premise of SDP is that grassroots, community-based sport, with a focus on participation and increased access, holds promise as a social justice and development strategy, particularly in terms of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals in the Two-Thirds World (Hayhurst 2009). There are various arenas where sport is now formally used to achieve progress and improvement, including in relation to environmental sustainability, conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS prevention, economic development, entrepreneurship, and gender equality. Despite the inclusion of gender equality as one of the main tenets of sport for development and peace programming, Saavedra (2009, 137) argues that, within the sport for development and peace movement, “a focused gender analysis on the use of sport is not common.” SGD initiatives comprise only a relatively small number of the approximately 300 projects listed on the International Platform on Sport and Development website, with only 34 identified as having a component that specifically focuses on women and girls. Recent studies in SGD have demonstrated that sport participation programs lend young women the opportunity to challenge their domestic duties, improve their social networks and relations with communities, confront gender norms, boost self-confidence and self-esteem, advance communication skills, and increase their ability to make decisions regarding their own well-being (e.g., Forde 2008). However, such benefits do not necessarily arrive without considerations of competing obligations (e.g., gendered divisions of labour) and safety, particularly in terms of sexual violence in sport (Saavedra 2009). Others caution that programs designed to empower females through sport are “paradoxical” given the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity that favours male “privilege and power,” and where a Euro-American hegemony vis-a-vis the Global South is often tied to such initiatives (Saavedra 2009, 125). Using a postcolonial feminist lens is therefore paramount in order to challenge the historically Eurocentric gender analyses so prevalent in sport and physical activity research. As a global movement mostly led by corporate donors in the West and international organizations such as the UN, the Girl Effect initiative has perhaps normalized such Eurocentric perspectives on gender by assuming that microfinance programs, self-empowerment, and individual self-responsibility are the answers to “developing” many countries in the Two-Thirds World. Without question, the Girl Effect mantra and other development regimes that build on its premise tend to recycle former discourses of colonial paternalism as “Third World girl” empowerment narratives that construct girls in the Global South as requiring the benevolence of their counterparts in the One-Third World in order to be “saved” (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). As Sensoy and Marshall (2010, 302) argue, such narratives “depend on what can be cast as a neo-missionary helping relationship between the Western girl/woman/’feminist’ subjects (consumers/readers/helpers) and non-Western girl/woman/’oppressed’ objects” (e.g., “victims”/distant others/passive recipients).
Some scholars also suggest that development strategies promoting the “alleviation of poverty” discourse actually perpetuate neoliberal market-based approaches to development (such as microfinance initiatives) that measure girls’ and women’s empowerment through economic development instead of focusing on transformative processes for their social development (Eyben 2006, 595). Yet, since the global financial crisis and the (potential) retreat from neoliberalism, a new level of reliance on NGOs and other non-state actors such as MNCs has occurred in order to maintain the momentum of sport for development and peace initiatives (Black 2010). Indeed, Levermore (2010, 236) describes the explicit neoliberal messages embedded in CSR-development related initiatives, and notes the apprehension of some when it comes to involving private and commercial interests “with their headquarters in the North [who] hijack more altruistic developmental creeds...Northern private interest can sometimes clash with local/Southern development priorities by usurping either domestic suppliers or non-profit organizations.”

For the purposes of this paper, the rise of GCSE interventions in sport for development and peace is of particular interest. It is of crucial importance to highlight that GCSE differs from corporate social responsibility (CSR), which may be defined as the idea that “corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law or union contract” (Allouche and Laroche 2006, 3). That is, CSR connotes that corporations will comply with approved labour codes and environmental regulations and become advocates for human rights. This role of the corporation opposes contentions by classical liberalists such as Milton Friedman who reiterate that the only social responsibility of business is to turn a profit (Friedman, 1970). (CSR is also traditionally seen as distinct from notions of philanthropy, or the act of donating money or goods where there is no material reward to the donor (Hayhurst and Kidd, 2011).

However, it is pertinent to point out that the lines between CSR and philanthropy continue to blur at a rapid rate. As King (2006, 4) argues, in the last two decades, the notion of strategic philanthropy has shifted corporate agendas, where donations are no longer simply made without a strategic understanding of how such financial contributions impact a corporation’s bottom line, markets or employees. King (2001, 268) uses the term “global strategic community relations programs” (GSCRs) to describe the vast efforts of corporations to create transnational philanthropy and community relations interventions that pair community involvement with a particular “aspect of corporate social responsibility.” Bhanji (2008, 55) defines global corporate social engagement (GCSE) interventions as “the varying terminology used by transnational corporations to set their normative terrain in social policy issues.” For the purposes of this paper, I attempt to fuse King’s and Bhanji’s conceptions of GSCR/ GCSE by considering how such interventions may also be understood as a vast array of strategies used by corporations to become politically, economically and/or culturally involved, on a transnational scale, in social and development issues. CSR is thus distinguished from GCSE (as King carefully delineates above) due to the former’s broader/more general concern with the economic, ethical, legal, and flexible responsibilities of corporations. That is, CSR is a type of GCSE activity.

In a related trend, several researchers have illustrated that girls and young women are not only targeted by development initiatives and/or GCSE interventions, but are also the purveyors of these activities. For instance, Heron (2007, 148) argues that there is a disproportionate number of female volunteers in the Two-Thirds World, “most of whom are white and virtually all of whom are middle class.” She further argues (2007, 148) that there is a certain pressure on middle-class white women to “stake a claim to the moral high ground,” particularly when it comes to development work. For Heron, because development work is supposedly about “helping Others,” it “particularly fulfills this imperative for female members of the dominant group in...Northern countries” (Heron 2007, 7). A related array of research in sport and health studies also discusses the helping imperative of women. Though not focusing explicitly on the Two-Thirds World, these studies document the recent upsurge in cause-related marketing campaigns that focus on women as consumers (King 2001, 2004; Polonsky and Wood 2001), and specifically suggest that white, middle- to upper-class women in the West are seeking socially attractive causes to locate their “inner-philanthropist” (Bailey 2002). In the next section of the paper, I briefly outline various theoretical trajectories to help illuminate some of these issues.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Postcolonial Feminist International Relations Theory

A postcolonial feminist approach to exploring GCSE interventions in SGD is useful for understanding how institutionalized forms of oppressive power are immersed within imperial and Eurocentric discourses. In this way, a postcolonial feminist approach foregrounds intersectional analyses that reconstruct how race, class, sexuality, and nation interact to frame social institutions, and offers an anti-colonial approach to social science by locating identities and power relations within interlocking oppressions (Ling 2002). As noted earlier, Eurocentric/Western/Northern understandings of gender universalize and homogenize the experiences of women, fail to theorize the material inequalities and ideological struggles of historically situated agents in the global neoliberal economy, and subsequently ignore alternative forms of knowledge or voices of resistance (Peterson and Runyan 2010).

By fusing an international relations approach to postcolonial feminism, key concepts such as wealth, borders and power are re-examined as products of social relations that are tied to certain understandings of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and culture in world politics. As Ling (2002, 233) explains, “postcolonial IR examines the organization of power through a complex of social relations, both internally and externally, where positions of power and powerlessness shift, coexist, and renegotiate.” Although MNC’s involvement in SGD interventions may help their corporate image and allow them to “look good while doing good” (Himmelstein 1997), a postcolonial feminist IR lens would view such activities with an eye to the historical presence of corporations in development (see Li 2007), and would also consider neocolonial interests and privilege in world politics.

Khan et al.’s (2010) novel research on a Western-led CSR intervention into Pakistan’s soccer ball industry draws on postcolonial theory to (re)position CSR by turning the gaze back to the West and exploring how the economic structures, practices, and processes in the One-Third World result in marginalized conditions in which labourers are forced to work. Khan et al. (2010, 18) urge those studying CSR in the Two-Thirds World to use postcolonial frameworks in order to acknowledge the “continued reverberations of Western imperialism in the [Two-Thirds World] and how that informs local actors’ sense-making, particularly with respect to engagements with the West, such as a CSR intervention.”

Taken together, these studies emphasize the utter need for a postcolonial feminist IR approach to complicate, contextualize and highlight the contemporary dominance of structural and material inequalities in the global system. Such an approach ignites a more in-depth analysis of GCSE interventions in SGD that shifts our attention to the implications and inadvertent effects of these systems for the supposed “beneficiaries” in lieu of the more established concern with the impact such initiatives have on a company’s bottom line (Hopkins 2006). In the next section, postcolonial feminist IR frameworks prove useful for thinking critically about issues of transnational governance and private authority in SGD.

Transnational Private Governance, Political Rationalities and Expert Authority

Various CSR-development scholars argue that corporations are filling the governance gap in the Two-Thirds World, where responsibility for social and economic development has shifted to the private sector from the state (Sharp 2006). However, as Idemudia (2008) points out, there is an assumption that states in the Two-Thirds World continue to function alongside business, while also regulating and supporting corporate involvement in development initiatives, yet such assumptions do not account for government corruption or political instability. Sharp (2006) further argues that corporations have no reason to disclose the extent of government corruption in the areas where they conduct business and implement GCSE-related initiatives, as doing so would possibly trivialize their work in these countries. In this way, corporations are able to “replace” key state functions, or so they claim, but the claim is questionable. As well as this, the modalities of government have extended not only to MNCs, but across different international actors such as NGOs and private foundations, a phenomenon that has been coined as “transnational governmentalities” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). As Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue:

Transnational alliances forged by activists and grassroots organizations and the proliferation of voluntary organizations supported by complex networks of the state to NGOs and other ostensibly
nonstate agencies, we argue, is a key feature, not only of operation of national states, but of an emerging system of transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 990).

Taken a step further, research that has built on transnational governmentality studies describes how non-state actors have become more prominent in exercising power, governing global spaces, and regulating global relations (Cutler 2010). A transnational, neoliberal governmentality mobilizes private authority that can be exerted by MNCs, NGOs, faith-based entities, and other non-state institutions. In fact, transnational private governance is supported by, and helps to stabilize neoliberalism (Cutler 2010). The legitimacy of transnational private governance is solidified by “the special governance capacities of private actors with technical knowledge and expertise” (Cutler 2010, 159), and the expertise of private actors (e.g., MNCs) are rarely questioned, as there is little probing as to whose interests they represent, or to whom they might be accountable (Cutler 2010).

Cutler’s assertions on the importance of authority and expert knowledge in transnational private governance fold neatly into Rose and Miller’s work on authority outside of the state, authority that they argue is enhanced by political rationalities and forces that operationalize techniques and agents that are able to “govern at a distance” (Rose and Miller 1992). Rose and Miller (1992, 175) speak to the interconnections and interdependencies between political rationalities and governmental technologies. First, political rationalities denote “the changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualized [and] the moral justifications for particular ways of exercising power by diverse authorities.” Following this, governmental technologies relate to the wide array of intricate programs, techniques, calculations, expert knowledge, and other tactics used by authorities to embody and impact governmental ambitions (Rose and Miller 1992, 175). I argue that such expert knowledge makes the governing of SGD by MNCs feasible, and that the private authority of MNCs (supported by neoliberalism), results in their ability to manage girls’ involvement in health and sporting activities as a CSR strategy – a strategy that may be examined both as a technology of governmentality and as a political rationality. In the next section, I describe the research methods used to collect data for this project.

Research Methods

The findings discussed here draw from a larger study that focused on GCSE interventions by considering how social relations among an international women’s rights NGO (based in Western Europe), a Southern NGO based in Uganda, and a MNC funding SGD programs influence the aid chain. This paper focuses solely on seven semi-structured interviews with staff members who worked in the CSR department of a MNC that funds SGD interventions in multiple countries throughout the Two-Thirds World. Thus, this paper is limited by the fact that I do not incorporate the perspectives, understandings, and beliefs of the international and Southern NGO involved in the aid chain, which appears to contradict the postcolonial feminist framework I aim to prioritize. However, I argue that focusing on the actor at the ‘top’ of the aid chain provides a useful starting point for teasing apart the discourses, ideologies, and understandings of MNCs who are involved in funding development interventions.

The MNC concerned first started funding the SGD program in Uganda through its partnership with the international women’s rights NGO. The NGO receives funding from other corporate donors as well, including an international investment bank and an advertising agency. Government agencies and foundations also contribute to its income. These organizations were chosen for this study due to the researcher’s ability to access the relevant research sites in Europe and Uganda through a graduate research exchange organized through the University of Toronto. This MNC also funds a range of SGD projects in the Two-Thirds World, and has a CSR department and a budget that is specifically allocated to funding SGD programming.

After receiving ethical approval to proceed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the MNC’s CSR staff, taking place between October and December 2009. Four interviews were carried out in person and three over the telephone, with each lasting between 60-120 minutes. Telephone interviews were deemed practical given the international locations of the other three CSR staff members. All seven interviewees were women and at the time of the research, three of the interviewees were no longer employed with the MNC’s
CSR department but had been working there within the past two years. The positions of these staff members included those of CSR Analyst (2), Regional CSR Representative (2), CSR Officer (1), and CSR Manager (2). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim from digital recordings, and the data were thematically coded using categorical aggregation, a technique frequently used in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). Data coding and analysis were conducted using NVivo 8, a qualitative data analysis software program that assisted in classifying quotations from interviews under emergent themes. Below, I discuss findings that revealed three major themes highlighting the colonial residue within corporate-funded SGD interventions.

RESULTS

The Power of Expert (Transnational) Corporate Knowledge

Knowledge (which is accepted as truth), is often produced by experts in order to manage populations (Foucault 1991). As McDermott (2007, 308) contends, “expert-based knowledge of the population, both collectively and individually, is produced through data gathering, monitoring, establishing norms and developing population-based interventions.” These issues speak to the first finding which relates to the legitimacy, authority, and power of expert (transnational) private knowledge. In essence, this was tied to the idea that corporate sponsors are able to “preside over” SGD programs based on their position as specialists with professional knowledge on how to create “successful” SGD initiatives, and to intervene where the state had failed to build and provide environments conducive to gender equality, physical activity participation, and healthy living. More broadly, this finding also corresponds to recent sport for development and peace studies that illustrate the concurrence of increased NGO “professionalization” and neoliberal development approaches, which fosters competition for funds and donors between NGOs working in SGD (see Darnell 2010a).

As part of an employee engagement strategy, CSR staff were deployed to an East African country to share their “business knowledge” with a SGD NGO they were funding. When speaking of her time volunteering in East Africa, one CSR Analyst described her guilt for the power she felt she held over the African NGO’s agendas and plans. She said she was concerned because she sensed she had “too much influence” over the African NGO’s agendas and plans. She attributed this to the authority of MNC’s brand.

Whenever [MNC’s] brands involved, it’s almost like… I have to be careful not to influence them [SGD NGOs in the South] too much, because they want to please the donor…I have to be very sensitive not to try to control or direct their agenda or their plan…If I said “Oh you should do this,” they’d go “Ya, we’ll do that!” It was very interesting for me, you know. Because when you come from a Western, corporate environment, it’s very easy – you think you’re helping but you’re almost changing the direction or changing the content (CSR Analyst).

The CSR Analyst (along with two other interviewees) described how the MNC’s employees went over to this particular East African country as part of an employee engagement strategy, where they trained local SGD NGO staff members to help them “improve” their HR, finance, accounting, PR, and website skills. The goal, according to the CSR Analyst, was to help this NGO professionalize so that it would be more attractive to prospective donors and subsequently mobilize more funding. Four other interviewees spoke of the need to help disseminate “business savvy skills” across the SGD “sector”. To accomplish this, the MNC created its own formalized social network (on-line and off-line) among the NGOs in order to ensure that limited resources were used in productive ways.

Essentially [the network] was a [MNC] driven initiative – where…Because of limited resources, this is the only way we [MNC staff] can support a lot more NGOs into those connections. And essentially what we’re doing is helping them with their capacity building. So we use their employees, we’d host a workshop twice in the year, and we’d invite the NGOs to that workshop, and the topic would range from PR, management, digital marketing, either those kind of topics (Regional CSR Representative).
In this way, MNC employees contributed to the one-way flow of practices and knowledge from the perceived “civilized North” to the “uncivilized South,” which Razack (2004) suggests creates a framework of “citizens” and “non-citizens” that works to confirm the humanitarian character of development interventions (Razack 2004). Such initiatives produce a neoliberal space for the Southern NGO, where staff are able to self-regulate and discipline themselves to be a “business conscientious” population who are now “better prepared” to thrive and survive in the competitive, neoliberal climate of development work.

The expertise and knowledge contributed by the MNC was not only about professionalizing the NGOs with whom they partnered, but also filling the governance gap by providing services and welfare needs for girls and women, including as one interviewee suggested, services outside the realm of their core competencies. One CSR Manager provided an example of how far MNC would go to become involved in supplying, and then branding, basic needs for girls and women in an African refugee camp where their employees were volunteering on a SGD project.

It was interesting when we asked the girls in [refugee camp], what they needed to participate in sports. Menstrual pads. So we created two factories and, again, that’s not an [MNC’s] job.... We created two – three factories – one in each of the camps. And what they did is they made menstrual pads. The workers got paid a small amount of money, and they... because without menstrual pads, girls can’t go to school and they can’t play sports. One week out of the month you’re home. If you’re a week out of the month home, if you’re a week out of the month home, there’s no way you can keep up with your studies, you quit school. So, the second thing they said was, “we really need our own toilets”... they painted [MNC’s logo] on it. [MNC’s] not in the toilet business, but if the girls were going to play sport, they needed their own toilet; they could not, in that society, risk being dishonoured or dishonouring their families by not having their own toilets, so we said okay, toilets (CSR Manager).

While the MNC may be applauded for successfully providing basic sanitation and health needs for girls and women in this refugee camp, and subsequently creating more opportunities for their participation in sporting activities, the larger structural inequalities that prevent these services from being provided in the first place are (for the most part) ignored. That is, framing the girls and women in this refugee camp as the appreciative recipients of these provisions and services simply reinscribes static elite conceptions of girls in the Two-Thirds World as victims, instead of questioning the broader social, economic and political forces that lead to the private authority of MNC in this particular situation.

In effect, then, the MNC, although “not in the toilet business”, was able to step in and fill the “governance gap” by providing this service (while in the meantime branding the bathroom with their company logo). Cumulatively, between lending professional advice to Southern NGOs, and providing services that perhaps should have been allocated to the state, MNCs’ tactics seem to represent “technologies of power through their surveillance and normative effects” McDermott (2007, 308-309). In this way, “experts play a critical role in determining what aspects of people’s lives require guidance to ensure population welfare” (McDermott 2007, 309). Further to this is the notion that “saving the Other” prevents a critical examination of how MNCs (and neoliberal globalization, sustained by elites in the One-Third World) may have contributed to their situation in the first place, and where the responsibility of Western-based entities such as the MNC really lies (Razack 2004). The next section explores the idea of salvation and the implications of “saving distant Others” in greater depth.

Locating Authentic Subaltern Impact Stories at the “Bottom of the Pyramid”

The second finding spoke to the ways in which corporations searched the Two-Thirds World for female entrepreneurs who would lend support, innovation, and legitimacy to MNCs’ brands, and help the MNC to reach new “untapped markets” in Sub-Saharan Africa, South America and the Middle East. Interviewees stressed the importance of locating compelling and “authentic stories” about the successes of grassroots NGOs or female entrepreneurs who had effectively used sport to promote girls’ and women’s rights, empowerment, or gender equality.

From a brand perspective they [social entrepreneurs] also help us feed ideas towards what the brand can look for – to build new strategies and new initiatives and new campaigns. We’re really looking
for inspirational stories – for initiatives that will feed the brand in terms of coming up with future initiatives (Regional CSR Representative).

Such innovative approaches to SGD interventions not only provided the MNC with new branding strategies, but also granted it access to cutting-edge projects, giving MNCs an opportunity to showcase their support of these “grassroots” initiatives to socially conscious consumers. As the other Regional CSR Representative confirmed:

If you start – I mean, if you support some project on girls and women, you can get fantastic associations for your brand, and you can use that for consumers, and you’re going to be one of the first to be able to reach this market.

As King (2004, 482) argues, MNCs now need to “struggle to gain ownership over the ethos of generosity… [therefore] corporations have invented new ways to differentiate their versions of generosity from those of their competitors.” This drive for corporate social engagement, when enmeshed with neoliberal globalization, pushes for social innovation and entrepreneurship to survive in an increasingly competitive and unstable global economy

Three interviewees also discussed the importance of MNC’s drive to locate authentic stories told by NGOs or social entrepreneurs about the “power of sport” to address gender inequalities in their local communities. The role of the MNC was to then “amplify these stories” globally through the use of their brand. For example, stories were often showcased via the sport for development networks convened and sponsored by the MNC. Indeed, as one Regional CSR noted, “the hope was that these networks would become incubators of ideas for development of new products of bottom of the pyramid or social programs.”

One of the CSR Analysts stressed that the “impact stories” the MNC located from “grassroots entrepreneurs” were more cost-effective than sending development workers abroad.

We believe from a development perspective, from an impact perspective, that an impact story – is much stronger with lots of grassroots social entrepreneurs than…a model that, you know, costs $40,000 to send a Western volunteer into a developing country. And if you start looking at the cost structure, you start thinking “Hmmm, how great is that story! It’s like the Red Campaign. Like how much money do you need to spend to get that one dollar that you get?”

Boje and Khan (2009) remind us that corporations have the authority and power to disseminate compelling stories of individuals in the Two-Thirds World who otherwise may remain “voiceless,” i.e., a subaltern to be revealed, but who cannot speak. In general, impact stories often discussed how a woman or girl from the Two-Thirds World overcame adversity and political, economic, or social struggles through the power of sport. In some cases, the MNC would post a video of the woman’s or girl’s SGD project on-line, but most of the time, such stories were still overtly sponsored and branded by them. Without question, then, these stories were useful for supporting and lending strong associations to the MNC’s brand, and for reaching new untapped markets in Africa, South America, and the Middle East.

Finding these markets was often done through locating social entrepreneurs (often women and girls) who were doing pioneering work around SGD programming, and then funding/partnering with these individuals. This is not to say that the MNC was not helpful or supportive in terms of inspiring, driving, and mobilizing the important work of these entrepreneurs. Rather, the concern lies with the seemingly colonizing tendencies that were used to gain access to grassroots ideas and activities that would, as the Regional CSR Representative claimed, “feed the brand in terms of coming up with future initiatives.” By working with and locating SGD entrepreneurs in new markets across the Two-Thirds World, MNCs would be able to even increase their sales by accessing those four billion poor “customers” (i.e., those who live on less than $2 a day) at the bottom of the pyramid. In fact, five of the interviewees spoke of harnessing the “bottom of the pyramid” model, which suggests that those residing in extreme poverty (four billion low-income consumers outside of mainstream markets at the bottom of the pyramid) can be a market in themselves that can be served with low-cost goods and services (Prahalad, 2005). For example, one CSR Manager explained how MNC’s support of the SGD initiative taking place in the refugee camp held significant implications for accessing women in the Middle East as new customers.
The next billion consumers are not going to look like the first billion. [MNC] is a very, very strong market with the first billion consumers, but...people who can afford [MNC's] stuff is not even at the very tip...So when we did the [SGD program in the African refugee camp], it was great and altruistic but it also really gave designers a lot of insight into if MNC was ever going to pursue more actively the youth bulge around the Middle East.

These discussions around “accessing women” in the Two-Thirds World as “new customers” are further contextualized in the next section through an examination of the politics of sisterhood in the SGD context.

The Politics of Sisterhood and “Saving Distant Others” through Sport

Throughout the interviews, the MNC’s staff argued that CSR, and social causes more broadly, have always been initiated, mobilized and/or sustained by women, and felt that they could use this propensity to their advantage in terms of building their brand. Other interviewees specifically discussed how the MNC’s increasing involvement in funding and promoting SGD initiatives was needed to lay the groundwork for an amplified focus by the MNC on girls’ and women’s sports. As one CSR Manager observed:

The woman, the female consumer we know has always been more interested in social issues and that was, I think, the cue we were taking to start to build a portfolio that the female consumer could connect with. And that was where the gender and development or sport and empowering women through sport emerged. So it’s like, if the consumer wants to stand for an issue, if they care about an issue, we were happy to sort of make that connection, but as long as it had something to do with sport.

The strategy used to encourage a consumer to stand for an issue was also, in a way, used to “create and market a global sisterhood” between mothers and daughters in the One-Third and Two-Thirds World. This tactic was helpful not only for attracting consumers as sustainable supporters of the SGD movement, but also as long-term customers for the MNC. As the other CSR Manager explained:

If the [MNC’s] target age in consumers is females 15-35, and I know that someone – a mother whose working out here is facing all the dilemmas of time... if she can see herself in another mother someplace else...If you go to [an African country] and you connect those girls with Canadian girls...you will have solved those funding issues. Those kids [Canadian girls] will be motivated, and they will care about brands that they see supporting those girls. Not out of pity, but because there’s a sisterhood involved.

Two other interviewees described the need to engage female consumers in the One-Third World to empathize with their “counterparts” in the South. Despite the possible good intentions of this CSR Manager, issues of pity and salvation that tend to characterize the consumer-based philanthropy she describes do little to actually critically engage with and question the underlying mechanisms of inequality that continually perpetuate the marginalized situations of girls and women in the Two-Thirds World. In a similar way to that of CSR initiatives such as Product RED™, the MNC aims to encourage mothers and children to support brands that are involved in SGD. I suggest that this act potentially reinscribes the colonial past of the West by implying that those who purchase SGD-endorsed products assume that they are the savours of its targeted beneficiaries (Ponte et al. 2009).

Furthermore, the inherent dangers of a woman in the One-Third World seeing herself “in another mother someplace else” ignores the transformative aspect of feminist politics that is culturally and historically specific (Mohanty 2003). While acknowledging that many mothers in the One-Third World may possess a sincere desire to be part of a project for improving the conditions and sporting experiences of mothers and children in the Two-Thirds World, this “will to improve” exacerbates a fundamental inequality between who is transformed and who does the transforming (Li 2007). Abu-Lughod expresses this dilemma in the following way:

When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her to something. What violations are entailed in this transformation, and what presumptions are being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her? Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged (Abu-Lughod 2002, 788-789).
In effect, a postcolonial feminist perspective highlights the multiple identities and social locations of women and girls in a way that promotes mutual respect and understanding, and recognizes the dangers of claims to universal sisterhood or the homogenization among women across cultures. In the final section, I explore these issues in greater depth, and also provide suggestions for future research.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this paper, I have used postcolonial feminist IR theory and studies in transnational private governance and political rationalities to show how expert knowledge and notions of saving the “distant Other” through “global sisterhood” lend legitimacy and authority to MNC’s involvement in governing, disciplining and “developing” women and girls through sport in the Two-Thirds World. Though the motivations behind the “Girl Effect” and MNCs’ “charitable” work with women and girls and its effects on the local socio-political structures it targets seem to be benevolent and perhaps rather harmless on the surface, a postcolonial feminist framework deepens our sensitivities to the impact such initiatives might have on subalterns and the social and economic inequalities they face.

It is also important to think about the complicity of the West in perpetuating the very global inequalities that justify GCSE interventions in the first place. As Darnell (2010b) suggests, we need to distinguish between charity and issues of inequality in sport for development and peace research and practice. A possible departure point for addressing this distinction is to turn our gazes back to the MNCs in the One-Third World and question how they might be complicit in “the stunted choices and deprived conditions the poor and marginalized see before them” (Khan et al. 2010, 16).

While for the most part, this paper has provided a critical analysis of a MNC’s engagement in SGD initiatives, I’m not arguing against the benefits of corporate support of social change and increased economic opportunities for marginalized women and girls, nor am I condemning their involvement in helping to address gender inequities in sport and development. As several scholars have demonstrated, there are certainly some good intentions and benefits to private sector participation in international development (see Hopkins, 2006). What I am arguing for is working together with girls and women in the Two-Thirds World in building transnational solidarity, respecting differences and using a more “egalitarian language of alliances, coalitions, and solidarity, instead of salvation” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 789).

I am concerned that GCSE interventions in SGD simply inscribe a space in which MNCs are able to legitimize their governance and authority without any challengers or resistance. Yet, this assumes that girls and women in the South lack agency – a very dangerous assumption to make indeed. However, as economic models of development become increasingly popular, how are subalterns to challenge the powerful discourses of neoliberal globalization, often perpetuated (partly) by MNCs, as they impact SGD? Perhaps a starting point might involve a careful reflection on how those residing in the One-Third World may take responsibility upon themselves and question the material, institutional, cultural, political, and global forces that exacerbate the situation of girls and women in the Two-Thirds World who continue to be viewed by MNCs as develop(able) Others.

As new collaborations for international development involving the private sector are growing at an exponential rate, and the unintended and intended consequences of these initiatives remain unclear, more research needs to be conducted in this area, particularly to better understand the implications of the governance gap being filled by MNCs in social welfare provision (Bhanji 2008). Perhaps most importantly, future research on GCSE interventions in SGD would benefit from a postcolonial feminist lens in order to account for the perspectives of “targeted beneficiaries,” and focus on local development needs that are grounded in the relevancies, values, interests, knowledge, and cultural resources of local indigenous communities.

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Endnotes

1. A similar version of this paper is published in Third World Quarterly 32(3): 531-549.

2. Following Esteva and Prakash (1998), I will use the terms “One-Third World” (to refer to the Global North) and “Two-Thirds World” (to refer to the Global South). These terms represent the social minorities and majorities in both the North and South while attempting to remove ideological and geographical binaries as found in other terms (e.g., North/South). See Gustavo & Prakesh (1998). Interviewees from the MNC were concerned about having their identities and organizations’ names revealed. For this reason, all participants and organizational identities included in this study remain anonymous.

4. Foucault’s (1991, 89) “governmentality,” begins with the idea that “power relations have been progressively governmentialized…elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions.”

5. SGD initiatives only comprise a relatively small number of the approximately 300 projects listed on the International Platform on Sport and Development website, with only 34 identified as having a component that specifically focuses on women and girls.

6. As required by the University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Board, the names of these positions have been slightly altered in order to protect the identities of the research participants.

7. Note that this project is distinct from the SGD project in Uganda. It is a separate SGD program funded by the MNC.
References


