

Call for papers Special Issue in *Society and Business Review*

From Bhopal to Rana Plaza : The day After

Outcomes of 30 years of campaigns for human rights and environmental protection in global supply chains.

Guest editors

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In 1984, the Bhopal catastrophe killed thousands of victims and hurt hundreds of thousands. Thirty years after this tragedy, industrial catastrophes continue to occur on a regular basis. We all know that these catastrophes only represent the tip of the iceberg. We all know that only a few occasionally catch the attention of social movements, the media, and even, from time to time, consumers, who coalesce and put pressure on governments and firms. We all know that in the end, beyond the emotion caused by such events and the discourses from multinationals and developed countries' governments, nothing really seems to change.

How many Rana Plaza catastrophes are necessary to provoke a deep change, which could, at least, lead to the saving of thousands of lives?

How can it be that up until today, the only answers of MNC (Multinational corporations) to industrial risks have taken the form of CSR (Corporate social responsibility) practices, such as factories' social and environmental auditing? How can it be that up until today, the only answer from governments has taken the form of non-binding obligations, with the underlying idea being that multinationals have the capacity to self-regulate and restrain themselves?

In parallel, academic literature on CSR has grown widely, especially when it comes to understanding it through stakeholder theory. Two main axes have been developed: an ethical analysis of justifications, conditions of legitimacy and abstract obligations of CSR, and an empirical analysis of the outcomes of such policies. Both present limits: the former often focuses on ethical reasoning independently from its conditions of implementation (Bowie, 1998 et Vogel, 2008), and the latter assesses the outcomes from a technical point of view. It should be noted that empirical analysis of the outcomes of firms' CSR policies in terms of workers' emancipation and improvements of environmental protection are clearly of no more than marginal concern for the bulk of academic CSR literature.

However, critical work and literature on CSR practices do exist. Almost all the critical theorists (Banerjee, 2012 ; A. J. Mills & Mills, 2012 et Hanlon & Fleming, 2009) have been mobilized within CSR literature to interpret, more or less seriously, CSR developments. This Special Issue would like to deepen and broaden this path, and explore some limits

and questions raised by the lack of empirical analysis, especially in terms of results achieved by CSR practices which are supposed to implement CSR policies, and in relation to the absence of a more theoretical analysis of the framework needed to justify and elaborate such policies.

A critical and empirical approach to CSR practices makes it possible to identify several failures. Firstly, their limited results explain the fact that they have sometimes been counterproductive (Johnson & Cabarle, 1993). Conversely, some studies underline the success of CSR practices in maintaining a political order of status quo, through a neo-liberal bureaucracy with neo-colonial dimensions preventing more emancipatory alternatives (Khan, Munir, & Willmott, 2007; Khan, Westwood, & Boje, 2010). Secondly, CSR could be accused of using specific control mechanisms to favour a western model of work organization, and could come into conflict with local cultures which favour autonomy and freedom at work (De Neve, 2009 et 2014 ; Ponte, 2008). Thirdly, the analysis of global standards setters (Ponte, 2011 ; Levy & al, 2015) also reveals a hidden agenda wherein sustainability is managed in order to preserve and buttress the interests of dominant actors within a coalition of stakeholders. Fourthly, CSR could be seen as a way to preserve the core values of capitalism, such as private property, hierarchy and managerial power over employees in competition with each other (Fleming & Jones, 2012). These criticisms show that CSR cannot be reduced to certifications and audits. Not only does CSR have effects on underdeveloped societies, but there are also some underlying political stakes which are too often brushed under the carpet.

We consider that a strong and multi-disciplinary approach and analysis of these failures is the best, and perhaps the only, way to facilitate some constructive changes, and to open the way to an effective and efficient implementation of CSR practices, which in turn could lead to the future avoidance of industrial disasters and human tragedies.

The main goal of this SI is, then, to offer a clearer picture of what CSR practices have so far achieved in terms of results, by widening the debate around Corporate Social Performance (Mitnick, 2000), by taking into account Corporate Political Activities, and by using a multi- and inter-disciplinary approach.

The following is a (non-exhaustive) list of the questions which this Special Issue might address:

- Can CSR practices lead to a reinforcement of firms' legal obligations toward their global value chain?
- Or, on the contrary, does CSR participate in the dilution of firms' legal obligations into voluntary practices?
- What is the potential of current CSR practices to offer a basis that could pave the way for a more reformist agenda, leading to the attenuation of the violence of economic practices on workers, consumers and environmental protection?
- How do CSR practices preserve at a micro level the political order induced by globalization at a macro level?

- Could CSR lead to heightened competition between the poorest countries to attract foreign investments in the garment industry, and to an increase in the low cost logic on a social and environmental level induced by this competition?
- Can CSR be an effective tool with which to combat the corruption of political elites and local administrations if it does not feature some power of sanction which might be used to control working conditions?
- Is CSR really the friend or the enemy of organizational hypocrisy (Brunsson, 1986), and of the hypocrisy of some social auditing, as in the certifying of decrepit buildings as compliant with fire-regulations? To what extent, in the wake of disasters, do social auditors play the role of modern *pharmakoi*, the formalized scapegoats whose sacrifice allows for the ongoing legitimization of a bankrupt and ineffective system of control? (Guénin-Paracini & Gendron, 2010)
- Could alternatives to CSR be developed, such as the “New” strategies of social movements and trades unions, especially tactics aiming at hardening soft law initiatives into legally binding practices subject to the judgments of the courts (social movement after Bhopal catastrophe or French Law on Devoir de vigilance)?

This Special Issue welcomes interdisciplinary approaches and contributions combining perspectives from:

- political scientists, on CSR and corporate Political Action or CSR and social movements struggling for human rights at work
- philosophers, on theories of justice, governmentality
- legal scholars, on soft-law / hard law analysis
- management scholars, on organization theory perspectives of CSR practices and theoretical contributions based on empirical examination from secondary sources
- economists, on the impacts of CSR practices regarding development issues

Deadline for papers submission: 1st July 2017.

Please also note that there will be a pre-submission paper development workshop at the annual symposium of the SBR held at CNAM in Paris, next **6th March 2017** for interested authors.

For further information, please contact the guest editors of the special issue

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