ORGANIZATIONAL COLONIZATION, CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY
AND NATION-BUILDING IN INDIA:
“MORE DREAMS PER CAR”, OR LESS?

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the discourse of organizational colonization of the life-world and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in India through the launch of the world’s cheapest car, the Nano, by leading automotive company Tata Motors in January 2008. At stake is the affirmation of corporate responsibility as a ‘national’ task of social uplift in the emerging economy context, and the framing of alternative views as opposed to nation-building. A three-dimensional mode of analysis (Fairclough, 1992) was used to study organizational discourse at the levels of social context/practice, text, and discursive practice. Accordingly, a vast corpus – including the company’s web site, various reports and documents produced by the company, media releases issued by it, research reports by investment houses, CSR reports by non-governmental organizations, and news articles published by India’s largest English daily corresponding to the Nano launch – were examined. Four specific research questions were asked: (1) How is the Organization crafted as a social agent, in the case study at hand? (2) How is the Organization-State relationship framed in the case study, and what implications does this have for the nation-building ethic of corporate development and social responsibility? (3) How does the Organization address or engage with dissidents to the Nano project, especially the rural farmers protesting the land acquisition for the car factory? (4) How is the Organizational Project framed between the Organization-authored text (media releases) and the Media coverage? The analysis reveals dialectical understandings of corporate responsibility,
spanning the ‘business case’, stakeholder accountability, ethical/philanthropic and
Gandhian ethics, and Statist models. Corporate development is framed in terms of nation-
building, especially in terms of (urban) emerging economy aspirations, Othering rural
voices. While the infusion of politics operates as an effective organizational strategy
against dissidence, the Organization-State linkage problematizes the role of the
organization as neo-capitalist agent. Moreover, the Organization-Media linkage addresses
the role of social memory, whereby organizational colonization is enacted. The limitations
of the research design and implications for future study are also discussed.
This thesis is dedicated to my parents.

Because they always tried their very best to help me find my very best.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I owe an eternal debt to the city of Mumbai (Bombay) for an absolutely mesmerizing three-and-a-half years spent there. Mumbai is a dazzling city, full of contradictions and dialectics that play out in a myriad of ways, most of all perhaps in both its potential and its drawbacks. The home-base of several corporations, Mumbai is India’s richest city, the country’s financial nerve-centre, and is touted to be the next big node in the global finance map (if not one already!). At the same time, it is home to some 15 million people, crammed together like sardines in a can, contains Dharavi that is the largest urban slum in Asia, and is plagued by persistent communal tensions between Hindu-Muslim and native-outsider. The brilliant crucible of such diversity, Mumbai is also where I have come into intimate contact with corporate India, first as a business journalist and then as a public relations professional. This is a corporate India that I have investigated, reported on, reported for, and whose relationship to the society/community it is embedded in I now study through this thesis.

Through this brief introduction of my personal history, I hope to have created an entry point to understand the many discursive constructions at work related to corporate India and the role it is expected to play for Mumbai, India and the rest of the world. In their essay examining “globalization from below”, Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney (2005) call for studies to look at the interplay of globalization, organizational communication and political communication. While there has been a large amount of research on multinational corporations from the emerging economies of East Asia and China (see Carney, 2005; Collinson & Rugman, 2007), there has been relatively less on the Indian experience, before and after the country’s economic liberalization in 1991 (for a brief overview, see Chittoor & Ray, 2007; Kaushik, 1997; Khandwalla, 2002; Som, 2002). Noting the extraordinary role that corporations (and organizations in general) play in crafting social reality (Mumby, 1988), and the furious interplay of various ideologies/ideas/values that results in this ‘product’ (so to speak), I focus on studying the discursive constructions around a recent case study or “discursive event” (Fairclough, 1992). On January 10, 2008, the long-
awaited Nano was unveiled at the New Delhi Auto Expo by well-known Indian car makers Tata Motors Limited, a multinational corporation by every right (Tata Motors, 2008n). The “people’s car”, as it had been billed by both the company and the media, had been in the works for at least the better part of a decade, as Tata Group Chairman Ratan Tata’s “vision” for a modern India (Tata, 2008). It was the world’s cheapest car, with a showroom price of INR 1 lakh (US$ 2,500), and critics from across the globe and within the country had long argued that such a small price tag was impossible for an automobile. Tata Motors, whose tagline is “More Dreams Per Car”, was keenly aware of the Nano’s populist appeal and marketed it aggressively in this vein through its media releases (Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j, 2008h, 2008n).

Reflecting on the enhanced (and still burgeoning) prominence of the modern corporation in the lived reality of people across the world, Deetz (1992) remarks that “the extent of the modern corporate encroachment into nonwork life and transformation of other institutions might properly be called a ‘colonizing’ activity – a colonization of the life world” (pp. 17-18). This colonization, he notes, is not mechanistic, but “organic” in nature and has “arisen along the line of extension of dominant existing values and practices” (p. 18). Moreover, with the advent of globalization, there have been various “flows of disjuncture” (Appadurai, 1996, 2000) that further impress upon society the vigor of corporate organizations, and multinational corporations (MNCs) in particular. In my study, through the discourse surrounding the launch of the Tata Nano, I examine the truth of Deetz’s observation, paying due heed to the various disjunctural flows both within and without, to see how corporate colonization and “corporate power” (Bendel & Bendel, 2007) are manifested. Importantly, Stohl (2001) contends that oftentimes, “communication outside the workplace (at the international, national, local and interpersonal levels) reflects, reinforces or retracts efforts toward cultural/ organizational convergence” (p. 365). Thus, to understand the full spread of corporate power, it is not enough to consider merely corporate-authored actions or discourses but also the externally produced representations of such, and linkages among various organizational forms – corporate, State (which again may be local, regional or national), non-profit, media and the like – that affect “organizational reality” (Mumby, 1988) for society at large. Hence,
it is logical to extend the idea of “corporate colonization of the life world” (Deetz, 1992) to one of organizational colonization, that takes into account these inter-organizational ties.

A study attuned to the play of corporate power via institutional linkages necessarily asks the question ‘power over who or what?’; hence, instead of a superficial overview of globalization theory and organizational spread, it is important to probe issues of “organized silencing” (Clair, 1998) of viewpoints that are alternate/ opposed to the mainstream organizational reality sought to be created. As Clair (1998) puts it,

Silencing groups of people may take on a multitude of forms that we have only begun to explore.
Silence may be achieved through coercion or through hegemony. It may be created through discursive practices that privilege some and abandon others. Silence may be systematically structured through institutions or informally imposed through informal conversation.

Furthermore, silencing people may be achieved through incessant and noisy discourses. (pp. 67-68).

Similarly, Shome and Hegde (2002) argue that global/ local disjunctures of space, time and media successfully “reframe” the subaltern, blurring the lines and changing the positions between who is constituted as an authoring subject and who becomes authored to. On May 11, 2006, when the Chief Minister of the state of West Bengal announced that Tata Motors would roll out the Nano from his state, for which 997 acres of land would be acquired from rural farmers in Singur, a site 40 km away from the state capitol Kolkata (Calcutta), he was greeted by protests from landless peasants or sharecroppers who farmed in the area. While the actual owners of the land were monetarily compensated by the government, in many cases these owners were absentee landlords in faraway cities (and countries) who had no real investiture in the land. On the other hand, it was the sharecropper, who received little compensation because he didn’t own the land he tilled, whose livelihood was at stake. Since then, protests against the land acquisition have continued, and they have been countered by the government, the company and (most notably, perhaps) the shrill voice of the mainstream media. Another voice of dissent against the Nano came from environmentalists, who charged that large-scale production of the car would result in
unparalleled pollution and congestion in India’s urban centers. Thus, in examining the discourse surrounding the launch of the Nano, one also needs to study the representation of these alternative voices and ask whether indeed “More Dreams Per Car” were being created, or less.

I use the framework of corporate responsibility (or corporate social responsibility, CSR, as it is more popularly known) to examine both the reality of organizational colonization and the inevitable “silencing” (Clair, 1998) of alternative voices. The import of social responsibility of corporations, in a world where business controls considerable transnational resource flows, concurrent environmental effects, and (by extension) the livelihoods of large masses of people worldwide, cannot be discounted (see Blowfield, 2005; Breen, 2007; Cheney, Roper, & May, 2007; Garvey & Newell, 2005; Ganesh, 2006). A working definition of corporate social responsibility, put forward by Hayes and Walker (2005), argues that “it supports sustainable production, promotes an equitable distribution of benefits, preserves the environment, respects the dignity of every person, and involves stakeholders in decision-making processes” (p. 407). Such a definition sees CSR as still being primarily guided by corporate interests, reflecting a real world phenomenon that cannot easily be wished away because of inherent inconsistencies (see Cloud, 2007; Livesey, 2002; Munshi & Kurian, 2005, 2007), but at the same time recognizes its potential for stakeholder accountability and equitable distribution (see Christensen, 2007; Deetz, 2007, 2003; Livesey & Graham, 2007).

Previous research on corporate responsibility has largely studied CSR as an initiative set apart from the normal operations of a corporation, either as an exercise to generate good will (Chaudhri & Wang, 2007; Glover, 2007) or in response to a crisis to salvage corporate reputation (Ice, 1991; Livesey, 2002). This study extends the meaning of a corporation’s responsibility to a wider public and to a larger gamut of normal, competitive, day-to-day activities of the organization, and thus explores “the potential to ‘mainstream the values and principles of CSR into the routine operations of large transnational corporations” (Glover, 2007, p. 852). O’Connor, Shumate, and Meister (2008) argue that, in order to examine the social responsibility relationship existing (or supposed to) between corporations and society, one must consider the macro issue of organizational colonization and the corporation’s competitive
business practices. Accordingly, in my study, corporate responsibility and the creation of organizational reality via various institutional linkages (Organization-State, Organization-Media, etc.) go hand-in-hand, to examine the social ethics both propounded by and demanded of Indian organizations.

Additionally, an examination of corporate responsibility practices shows an emphasis on education, employment generation, community development and healthcare, which may be categorized as basic areas of nation-building and strengthening society (see Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta, John, Kumar, Maitra, Puranik, Shrivastava et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; PIC, 2003; SHRM, 2007). Thus nation-building emerges as a key driver for corporate social responsibility – especially in India, given the confluence of Gandhian, Nehruvian and post-reforms emerging-economy rhetoric (see Arora & Puranik, 2004; Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; Hardiman, 2003; Kumar et al., 2001; Mitra, 2007; Mehta et al., 2006; Richards, 1991) that will be discussed in Chapter 3. This ethic of nation-building is also evident in the present study of the Nano, since the new car has been billed since its inception as a car for the masses and one to bridge class-divides between the haves and the have-nots, the urban and the rural (see Tata, 2008). Thus, nation-building forms the third leg of this study, as I examine how nation-building rhetoric is used in the organizational discourse to silence dissidence against the Nano, re-inscribing corporate responsibility as having not just a ‘social’ agenda, but a ‘national’ one as well.

The locational factor of my study is significant, since previous research in the CSR arena has largely focused on the corporate responsibility activities of transnational corporations based in the West (see Carroll, 1979; Cloud, 2007; Conrad, 2003a, 2003b; Freeman, 2006; Kendall, Gill, & Cheney, 2007; Lammers, 2003; O’Connor et al., 2008; Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008; Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002), while only a handful of scholars have engaged with organizational ethics from the emerging economies of Asia (see Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; Chaudhri & Wang, 2007; Ice, 1991; Newell, 2005; Sriramesh, Ng, Ting, & Wanyin, 2007). India’s increasing economic clout in the global arena and the advent of a new breed of Indian multinational companies make it necessary to study what social responsibility means for Indian
business houses and how they exercise it (see Arora & Puranik, 2004; Bhushan, 2005; Gupta & Saxena, 2006; Shrivastava, 1995).

Thus, to summarize the purpose of this study, I explore both organizational colonization and corporate responsibility through each others’ eyes. Extending the meaning of corporate responsibility beyond particular CSR measures that are divorced from the normal operations of a business, I use the framework of organizational colonization to understand what corporate responsibility means in relation to the daily competitive business of a corporation. At the same time, I invert the problem to explore the phenomenon of organizational colonization and the organizational reality it engenders through the lens of CSR theory. At stake is the affirmation of corporate responsibility as a ‘national’ task of social uplift, and the framing of alternative views as opposed to nation-building ethics.

Posing the Research Problem and Questions

Central to this study is the recognition of plurivocality of discourse (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004) in the synthesis of organizational reality. I adopt a social constructionist methodology to examine the role of organizational discourse in creating/ sustaining/ modifying lived reality for society-at-large (see Allen, 2005; Burr, 1995; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Heracleus, 2004). In particular, I adapt Fairclough’s (1992) tri-dimensional method of critical discourse analysis, which he labels a “social theory of discourse”, taking into account not only the discursive text, but also the social practices and context within which it is embedded and the discursive practices of production/ distribution/ consumption/ interpretation that shape the meaning of discourse. Thus the case study I examine, the launch of the Nano, becomes not just a singular occurrence, but a “discursive event” (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1972) that sheds light on the corporate responsibility ethics crafted by organizational colonization of the life world.

Having laid down the general purpose and framework of this study, it is now my task to define both the research problems at stake and the research questions I explore. By research ‘problem’, I mean the compelling issue or phenomenon that forms the case at hand, essentially answering the ‘what’s at stake?’ question. A research ‘question’, on the other hand, is more localized, in terms of the actual
procedure and method of analysis this thesis adopts, and the specific questions it seeks to answer. After first clarifying the research problems, I will state the specific research questions of this study.

An important research issue I examine deals with the nature of discourse that creates and is created by organizational colonization. Thus, my first research problem can be put as: What are some of the diverse discursive strands at play in crafting the organizational reality of the Nano? In other words, is the “organized silencing” of alternative views merely a glorified case of “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 1995) of the world, or are there deeper disjunctures (Appadurai, 1996, 2000) at stake here? The research problem delves into the nature of what constitutes globalization flows and its opposing force (see Robertson, 1992; Robertson & Khondker, 1998). Can this opposing force be labeled a monolithic “national culture” (Hofstede, 1980, 1983)? The core theme of plurivocality guides my efforts to uncover the underlying threads of both national culture and globalization, so that I consider how diverse strains such as Gandhian philosophy (Hardiman, 2003, Richards, 1991), post-independence Nehruvian policy (Kaushik, 1997; Thornton; 1992) and post-liberalization laissez faire (Chittoor & Ray; 2007; Khandwalla, 2002) combine and re-combine to create new meaning of organizational ethics and organizational culture. In fact, several studies on CSR indicate that organizational ethics are increasingly viewed as a facet of the larger organizational culture of a corporation. For instance, Hollihan and Riley (1989) view effective corporate social responsibility as the vital external communication of a firm’s organizational culture; Zorn and Collins (2007) regard CSR as a kind of “management fashion” in vogue for globally competitive firms, similar to management-by-objectives method and other widely-adopted organizational styles; and Bean (2008) argues that organizational accountability is determined by the surrounding organizational culture.

My second research problem flows from the first, and may be phrased thus: How is this dialectic in cultural flows manifested in understanding and propagating organizational ethics and corporate responsibility? Put differently, how does socio-historical situatedness engage with spatial flows of ideology? Through my research, I find that the meeting between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ does not necessarily result in a collision, but is often a seamless transition (Appadurai, 1996; Cushman &
Kincaid, 1987), or as Clair (1998) words it, a dialectical approach “based less on dialectical tension and more on the simultaneous aspects of opposites” (p. 187). In the Indian context, while some scholars have posited that Indian firms have a long-abiding tradition of corporate social responsibility, based on their historical ties with the Indian independence movement and Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of “trusteeship” for Indian business (Hopkins, 2007; Mitra, 2007), several incidents (most notably the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984) belie this claim (see Garvey & Newell, 2005; Ice, 1991; Newell, 2005). Research conducted by both academics and industry suggest that instead of a blanket-guard of organizational ethics, there are several competing ideologies, values, and institutional linkages that result in a multiplicity of views on corporate responsibility (Arora & Puranik, 2004; Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006). Thus, I examine these competing themes to uncover the rationality of corporate responsibility surrounding the Nano launch.

Inherent in these research problems is the question of how the alternative/opposing view is framed (and/ or silenced), so as to propagate the unproblematic organizational reality favored by dominant interests. Noting the duality of power/resistance (Fairclough, 1992, Foucault, 1980, 1979; Mumby, 1988) and voice/silence (Clair, 1998), I explore how this dialectic plays out in the context studied. The research problem thus delves deeper into the issue of what and who is at stake: a focus on the concept of stakeholder (Bendel, 2005; Freeman, 1984; Miles, Munilla, & Darroch, 2006) in corporate social responsibility theory, and who is accorded the status of legitimacy herein. Moreover, the role of nation-building is also expected to be significant in these research problems, as an underlying stream in the CSR discourse. While motives of community development and social uplift are often cited by corporations for their CSR measures (see Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; SHRM, 2007; Sriramesh et al., 2007; Townsley & Stohl, 2003), I argue that these acquire a particular significance in the case of developing and emerging economy corporations, tinged as they are with the hue of nation-building. Such corporations, of which Tata Motors will be seen to be a prime example, thus emphasize their role in furthering the agenda of national growth. This provides a further slant to the organized silencing of
alternative views in emerging economies like India, by framing dissidents as opposed to the national project of growth.

Keeping these research problems in mind, the method used suggests certain key research questions. In particular, Fairclough’s (1992) tri-dimensional method of critical discourse analysis focuses on the social construction of agents, and the social relations between these agents. Accordingly, the analysis in Chapter 5 addresses four main research questions:

- **How is the Organization (Tata Motors) crafted as a social agent, in the case study at hand?**
- **How is the Organization-State relationship framed in the case study, and what implications does this have for the nation-building ethic of corporate development and social responsibility?**
- **How does the Organization (Tata Motors) address or engage with dissidents to the Nano project, especially the rural farmers protesting the land acquisition for the car factory?**
- **How is the Organizational Project (the Nano launch) framed between the Organization-authored text (media releases) and the Media coverage?**

These questions are re-stated at the end of Chapter 3, after detailing the theoretical framework of the study and a review of the relevant literature. In Chapter 4, I also address how the method of analysis adopted examines each of these research questions.

**Sites of Discourse Analysis**

I examine the discursive event of the *Nano* launch from a “three-dimensional framework”, as suggested by Fairclough (1992). First, I shed light on the social structures and macro “orders of discourse” that play a part in determining the structural arrangement and flows of discursive constructions. In other words, I flesh out the social context of the case study at hand, by drawing upon Tata Motors’ corporate web site, paying particular attention to the company’s core commitments, its testimony on corporate responsibility, mission statement, and various sustainability reports that the company has authored and posted online. This exploratory analysis is complemented by also referring to
sustainability and CSR reports produced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), industry and corporate bodies, and market research reports authored by investors/shareholders.

Thereafter, various media releases issued by the company are textually analyzed in terms of the social construction of actors and the social relations among them. All the releases studied pertain to the Nano, and were obtained from the corporate web site. They span a total period of over two-and-a-half years; the first is dated May 18, 2006, and announces that the proposed factory for the Nano will be built at Singur in West Bengal, while the last release studied is dated February 26, 2009, and announces the car’s commercial launch for the car.

I next examine the media discourse on the Nano launch, to study the Organization-Media linkages that reinforce organizational colonization (Deetz, 1992), and the discursive practices of production, distribution and consumption (Fairclough, 1992) related to the media releases. In particular, I analyze the news coverage in India’s largest English daily The Times of India during the three months surrounding the launch of the Nano.

The Thesis Outline

In the following chapters, I elaborate on the theoretical framework, literature review, methodology, method and mode of analysis used to examine the interplay of organizational colonization and corporate responsibility. Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the phenomenon of corporate power and colonization, together with the simultaneous “organized silencing” of alternative voices. In the same chapter, I consider the literature on corporate responsibility, in terms of both its theoretical/practical potential and drawbacks, so that the CSR framework is used to study the implications of organizational colonization. Noting the plurivocality of discourse (Grant et al., 2004), I also examine the root discourses of sustainable development (see Ganesh, 2007; Peterson, 1997) and ‘new’ capitalism (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Haas, 2003; Hopkinson, 1968) that are inherently manifest in the practice of corporate social responsibility.

Chapter 3 looks at the impact of globalization on organizational culture, and the dialectical exchange between ‘national’ culture and ‘modern’ business culture, in the case of Asian multinational
corporations. Based on the organizational culture approach of studying corporate/organizational power (Mumby, 1988), I extend the scope of organizational culture to include CSR. Hence, a dialectical view of globalization, national culture and ‘modern’ organizational culture becomes vital to understand corporate responsibility and organizational colonization. In Chapter 3, I also examine in detail how various flows of disjuncture contribute to creating a shared meaning of corporate responsibility among Indian firms as well as the larger public. Importantly, a review of the relevant literature reveals several ways in which this shared meaning falls short of rising expectations and/or traditional notions of organizational ethics, which becomes important in the analysis of voice/silence in the context of the Nano. While the failure of the conventional profit-centered case for CSR in India becomes apparent, both the need to wed corporate responsibility with normal business operations and the attendant ethic of nation-building in CSR come to the fore.

In Chapter 4, I explicate my methodological stand and my position as the external researcher carrying out discourse analysis. I approach this study through the lens of social constructionism, and note that while several meanings may be created by members sharing a lived reality, meaning does not degenerate into a muddle incapable of interpretation. Rather, “some meanings are more valid than others” (Heracleus, 2004) on account of power inequity and institutional linkages, while others are purposely waylaid, and I attempt to identify and interpret these meanings and how they simultaneously voice/silence their positions. The nature of organizational discourse thus assumes centre-stage in this chapter, as I explore discourse as not just a transmitter of communication and shared meaning, but also constitutive/creative of meaning – discourse becomes transformative as it is harnessed and interpreted to bring about social change (Grant et al., 2004; Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992). Macro/micro, power/knowledge and agency/structure dualities of discourse are examined, even as the limits of discursive construction are broached. In this chapter, I elaborate on what Fairclough (1992) has referred to as a “social theory of discourse”, a method of critical discourse analysis that pays heed to these various dialectics and is focused on the transformative aspects of discourse through social and discursive practices, in addition to analysis of the text. Thus, the issue of “intertextuality” (Fairclough, 1992) becomes important, which reminds us
that “while texts may be the discursive units on which the researcher focuses, discourse itself has an existence beyond any individual text from which it is constituted” (Grant et al., 2004, p. 12)

It is in Chapter 5 that my exposition on the organizational colonization of the life-world, corporate power and social responsibility by corporations in India, through the analysis of the Nano launch, is contained. The chapter consists of three sections, in each of which I examine the sites of discourse analysis to showcase the inherent intertextuality of discourse. First, there is an analysis of the social context/practice, that is, a deeper understanding of the case study, Tata Motors’ background and corporate reputation, and how it understands corporate social responsibility. Second, I examine the media releases issued by the corporation, starting with the announcement of the launch of the factory project in West Bengal, and ending with its commercial launch from a new location. Finally, in order to examine in greater detail the discursive practices of media releases, I analyze the media coverage surrounding the launch of the car itself in January 2008. Through these separate but related sections, I hope to provide an adequately coherent picture of the organizational colonization and silencing involved, studied through the lens of corporate responsibility.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the findings of my analysis, together with the limitations of the study. I also examine the implications for future research, while considering the present-day ongoing spread of organizations and globalization. While there are explicit lessons to be learnt for corporations and media institutions, state governments and communities should also be attuned to the reality of organizational colonization and imperatives of corporate responsibility.
CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZATIONAL COLONIZATION AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY:
MEANINGS, POTENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS

In this chapter, I explore the diverse meanings, potentials and limitations attributed to corporate responsibility, seen through the lens of organizational colonization and organized silencing. First, I explore in detail the idea of “corporate colonization of the life world” (Deetz, 1992), what it entails, and how the so-called ‘dominant’ paradigm of corporate responsibility (also referred to here as CSR) may be understood in terms of this. Then, I explore the critical argument against this dominant paradigm, as a reaction against the organized silencing of subjects/ positions opposed to this paradigm. Finally, I explore some frameworks for understanding corporate responsibility, taking into account and correcting for the organizational colonization.

Colonization and Responsibility

Organizational Colonization

The rise of the transnational corporation is akin to a new sort of “feudalism” or “colonization” of the life-world along the lines of dominant existing value-systems and practices, according to Stanley Deetz (1992). Thus,

The modern corporation has emerged as the central form of working relations and as the dominant institution in society. In achieving dominance, the commercial corporation has eclipsed the state, family, residential community, and moral community. (p. 2)

This focus on the organizational/ corporate sector borrows directly from the Habermasian (1984, 1987) postulate of the increasing permeation of life by the logics of the advanced capitalist system. In such a situation, the democratic ideals of society-at-large become paradoxically held hostage by the decidedly undemocratic norms of functioning within the corporate world (Deetz, 1992). Other scholars have more critically pointed to the “nexus” between corporate organizations, government agencies and corporate proxies, especially in the Third World (Ganesh, 2007; Munshi & Kurian, 2007). However, instead of
looking at corporate colonization through a simplified profit-chasing theory of dominance, corporate power needs to be seen as “not monolithic but more like a web that has sites or nodes of decision and control”, at once “centralized and dispersed”, as it creates organizational reality (Deetz, 1992, p. 23). Corporate power acts through lobbying state governments, campaign financing, capital ownership, capital mobility, litigation, agenda setting of the mass media, propagation of neoliberal ideologies (like ‘development’ or ‘fair trade’), socio-political discursive practices, and the reification of existing marginalities (Bendel & Bendel, 2007; Garvey & Newell, 2005).

Mumby’s (1988) organizational culture approach conceptualizes organizations as cultures, examining how members create and maintain a shared sense of “organizational reality” to use as a sense-making tool. Thus, corporate power acts through the use of organizational symbols, that may be verbal, actions or material, to propagate the dominant ideology (p. 16). Central to this process is what Mumby (1988) terms “cultural deformation”, that is, “the process whereby an organization’s culture is systematically distorted such that symbolic practices maintain and reproduce certain relations of dependence and domination” (p. 104), so that organizational members come to accept uncritically the ‘deformed’ reality. Extending Mumby’s theory of corporate domination to a context of organizational representation for a larger, external audience, cultural deformation may be seen as akin to Deetz’s (1992) systematically distorted communication and discursive closure, which are ongoing and interaction-led processes, so that “certain experiences and identities are preemptively preferred over equally plausible ones” (p. 174).

There are at least two important manifestations of systematically distorted communication or cultural deformation, which act in the exercise of corporate power: the first, “managerialism”, is based on present organizational culture and its networks, while the second, social memory, bridges both past and future to managerialism and the organization-sponsored subject/position. In the first case, managerialism does not denote a simplistic control of the corporation and its interests by a single person or class of people, rather it “is a kind of systemic logic, a set of routine practices, and an ideology” (Deetz, 1992, p. 222). Deetz (1992) treats managerialism as a discursive genre, a way of conceptualizing, reasoning
through and discussing issues, and which is based in the logic of manufacturing consent among participants. Thus, it has an inherent bias against conflict and toward consensus, which Deetz (1992) regards as problematic for the functioning of democratic principles. The rise and prevalence of managerialism is seen in several developments: the expansion of the corporate form across various sectors; the adoption of a (supposedly unbiased) “rational” ground for decision rather than traditional practices/ values; the separation of owner and manager in the daily management of the corporation; and the privileging of standard practices, routine solutions, short-term gains in efficiency/ revenues and usage of presumably shared values as ends in themselves since they become “rational” in the manager’s life, even if not economically rational for the corporation (pp. 207-218). The implications of managerialism for social responsibility are not favorable, avers McMillan (2007), as it is too instrumental, tech-specific, excludes stakeholders other than financial investors/ shareholders, attributional not accountable, monologic not dialogic, and steeped in organizational narcissism (see Ganesh, 2003). McMillan (2007) also observes that managerialism seeks to absolve the systemic by focusing on the individual.

Another important tool for organizational colonization is the “social memory” (Deetz, 1992) the organization inculcates, bridging both past events and future plans. While the concept of social memory has been derived from narrative theory, Deetz (1992) extends this by explicating that it is an artificial recollection of experiences, an organic account which talks of a dominant group’s journey into prominence (pp. 308-309): it is thus arbitrary, depends entirely on recollection, is thereby selective and organized according to recognizable scripts and images, and involves a morality dimension that “produce[s] heroes and villains and provides lessons and meaning” (p. 309). Recalling that organizational colonization mitigates alternative subjects/ positions, the organization-sponsored social memory is created through fragmented or frozen images of subjects/ positions that emphasize managerialism and de-stress conflict: “in this process, images enable greater systematic control and instrumental action in corporations through normalization than would be possible in simple authority relations” (p. 298). Accordingly, the moral dimension of heroes/ villains/ meanings is blurred by these frozen/ fragmented images and stories, so that the objective sense-making capacity of organizational members becomes compromised.
Such a view of corporate dominance invites further qualifications. Firstly, as Clair (1998) asks, “how does the existence of one organization provide the legitimacy for another?” (p. 189). Corporate power demands that we study in detail how interconnected organizations are and “highlight the shadows of the practices that provide support for injustices from institution to institution and from one institutional practice to another” (p. 189), and hence rather than talk about merely corporate colonization, it is more pertinent to examine the process of organizational colonization with all its interconnected links.

The institutional relations between mass media and transnational corporations become acutely important in this scenario. Deetz (1992) observes that “media messages elaborate ideology into common sense and everyday practices by reproducing social conflict in terms derived from the dominant ideology” (p. 33). The plurality of media agendas therefore becomes crucial in determining the social and organizational reality propounded by them. For instance, Wang (2007) examines the impact of media priming and framing on corporate responsibility perceptions to find that, though they act on different conceptual levels (awareness and meaning-making, respectively), they are most persuasive when used together, depending on the initial subject/position regarding a corporation. While press conferences, the reliance on media releases, organizing pseudo-events and so-called ‘exclusive’ interview frameworks have always facilitated these institutional links, more recent instruments like media ownership, advertising deals in return for equity stakes, media tie-ups and conglomeration have become particularly important. More importantly, there is a tendency for media organizations to relax their ‘watchdog’ function while reporting on corporations, as opposed to their almost maniacal zeal to expose governmental shortcomings (Conrad, 2003a; Deetz, 1992; Roush, 2004). Bendel and Bendel (2007) see a “blind acceptance of neoliberal economic ideology, such that many journalists are bemused by, and disinterested in, fundamental critiques of the economic system” (p. 62). In cases of widespread economic scandal or failure, Deetz (1992) notes that, more often than not, while corporations get away on a comparatively lesser charge of lack of social responsibility, the government is faulted for insufficient surveillance and preventive action.
Secondly, communities that face corporate/organizational power may differ in their reactions/responses to it, according to their perspectives on this power. They may regard corporate power as an opportunity to be directed for better use, or as a local obstacle to be surmounted, or a structural/systemic obstruction that always hinders socio-environmental objectives, or even as a structural/systemic obscenity that should not be allowed to exist simply because it embodies concentrated undemocratic power (Bendel & Bendel, 2007). Thus, reactions against corporate power may seek to remove it, redefine it, reduce it, restrain it, redress it, resist it, redirect it, or reinforce it. Bendel and Bendel (2007) argue that the first three tactics address the existence of the corporation itself and are used usually by those who consider corporate power to be a structural/systemic obstruction or obscenity; the middle three seek to counterbalance the corporation and are used by those who view it as a local obstacle or a systemic/structural obstruction; and the last two are used usually by those who see it as an opportunity for the better. Arguably, none of these tactics or world-views of corporate power are mutually exclusive.

Finally, the corporation/organization may be seen as an intentional actor that may be deemed morally accountable since it possesses “the capacity for being moral, for acting in a moral manner, for having intentionality in actions” (Schultz, 1996, p. 178). This intentionality is seen through corporate actions such as decentering individual identity in favor of the “corporate voice”, deindividuation whereby individuals perceive and enact the symbolic reality of the corporation, and distanciation or the rhetorical strategy used to create/maintain/alter the symbolic reality of diffused responsibility within the postmodern corporation both internally and externally. Deetz (1992) himself argues for a new age of “insightful responsiveness” amidst practices of corporate colonization (p.3).

The lens of organizational colonization and corporate/organizational power may be used to understand the framework of corporate responsibility. In this study, I take into account the multiple meanings of corporate social responsibility, both theoretically and practically speaking. The CSR discourse is not value-free and each of its meanings propagates its own biases that may or may not be assimilated/accentuated/adopted. This goes beyond the mere “economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations” (Carrol, 1979, p. 500) of society, beyond the mere reporting of social initiatives and the
triple bottom-line that “measures the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of organizational activity” (Bartlett, 2008, p. 1022). The discourse of corporate social responsibility is not isolated; it arises, is shaped by, and in turn shapes various other discourses of the developmental, organizational and communicative arenas. Next, I examine two macro-level Discourses (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) that are widely regarded to be the parents of corporate social responsibility: namely, ‘new’ capitalism and sustainable development. The child of what I refer to as ‘sustainable capitalism’ then is the corporate social responsibility of popular management literature and public relations theory, often referred to as the dominant paradigm or the ‘business case’ of CSR (see Bendell, 2005; Blowfield, 2005; Elkington, 1998; Ganesh, 2007, 2006; Newell, 2005).

‘New’ Capitalism

The traditional argument against corporate responsibility (most notably articulated by Milton Friedman, 1970) is that business should be conducted for the sake of business itself, not altruism. An analysis of Friedman’s (1970) famous article reveals that it was particularly successful in affecting the popular mindset of the time because it cleverly polarized its audience, addressed solely its supporters, painted opponents as misguided or dreamers, played on Big Brother fears and exalted the supposedly value-free virtues of the market (Aune, 2007). Such vehement reactions against corporate responsibility did not, however, prevent its subsequent enshrining within business ‘best practices’ by organizations the world over (for instance, see Cheney, Roper, & May, 2007). As early as 1968, there was a clear line of thinking that saw business as “a means to an end for society and not an end in itself” (Hopkinson, 1968, p.19). Even though the corporate responsibility envisioned in these early days prioritized the profit-demands of business, Hopkinson (1968) was clearly attuned to issues that modern-day critical-cultural scholars focus on, namely, a government-industry nexus, free-market monopoly, class inequality, gender inequality, and the interests of diffused publics.

To accommodate the idea of social responsibility of organizations, beyond a mere profit motive, the idea of capitalism itself has been arguably turned on its head, so that it reflects the need to promote development and growth in the communities affected both directly and indirectly by corporations (see
Hawn, 2008; Leenaars, 2008). To redefine ‘new’ capitalism in an age of the so-called “risk society” (Beck, 1999), Haas (2003) proposes an “ethic of futurity” that recognizes “the need for a broadened view of corporation-stakeholder interaction that encompasses both actual and simulated conversations depending on the anticipated effects of corporate actions on stakeholders” (p. 616).

In their transdisciplinary work blending sociology and critical linguistics, Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) examine new management ideology, to uncover the “spirit of capitalism”, defined as “an ideology which serves to sustain the capitalist process in its historical dynamism while being in phase with the historically specific and variable forms that it takes” (p. 187). Both macro/ longitudinal and micro/ cross-sectional, the secret of its success is its simultaneous roles of stimulating/ enthusing, promising security to the individuals who come under its gambit, and invoking the notion of unbiased fairness (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 188). According to Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), there are certain “legitimate orders” that normalize ideas of fair play within a capitalist society, and the ‘new’ organizational norms of leadership exemplify a “project-oriented or connectionist” disposition that ostensibly strives for the common good, listens to stakeholders, respects differences and generates trust. A similar blend of qualities is apparent in what Lammers (2003) calls the “rational myth” of the Chief Executive Officer, and Conrad (2003a) the “CEO-hero”.

Corporate responsibility and capitalism have been theorized in terms of distinct and consecutive social epochs; for instance, Maynard and Mehrtens (1993) argue that business is bound to travel from a financial focus in the first wave to eventually reach a fourth wave of social accounting. Hawken, Lovins and Lovins’ (1994) version of “natural” capitalism sees a due emphasis on the just valuation of natural resources, so that capitalist systems can be stable and self-sustaining in the long run. Moreover, Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) contend that the present era of ‘new’ capitalism is merely the third epochal shift in the “spirit of capitalism”, characterized by network-processes and connection-formations. Others have argued that adapting existing business networks and ideas to tap hitherto ignored Third World and rural markets will both generate better revenues for companies and also uphold their corporate social
responsibility, by supplying essential goods, increasing consumption capacity and helping with
development projects (for instance, see Prahalad, 2008; Sinha, Goodman, Mookerjee, & Quelch, 2008).

‘New’ capitalism is inexorably tied to the politics of globalization, and while the blanket-
domination by multinational corporations has been critiqued by various critical-cultural scholars (see
Appadurai, 2000; Robertson, 1992), organizational communication theorists have attempted to analyze
the discourse of the new ‘global’ economy and it’s “free market fundamentalism” (Conrad, 2003a).
Conrad (2003a) sees this fundamental and unshakeable belief in the power of the market as the most
remarkable achievement of the conservative right, and examines how the discourse propagates through
emphasizing the futility of the state in world economic affairs, its unanticipated consequences (and thus
perversity), and the jeopardy it is apparently most known for (pp. 7-8). The discourse of free-market
fundamentalism and globalization work to reinforce each other;

Related to the discourse of free-market fundamentalism is the argument that globalization,
technological development, and high-speed management combine to create a fundamentally new
economy, one that cannot function effectively if saddled with the demands imposed on the
organizations of the old economy… Indeed, it is futile for governments to try to resist the power
of the international markets, and their efforts to do so inevitably reduce the competitiveness of
their firms, thereby disadvantaging their own citizens. (p. 12)

Thus the emergent ‘new’ capitalism, while presenting a more social and more capable facade is
also very insistent on its neoliberal credentials and the lack of State regulation. Upon blending with the
discourse of sustainability, it bears a ‘business case’ for corporate social responsibility that is necessarily
voluntary in nature.

Sustainable Development

Another macro-level Discourse seen as a precursor to the dominant paradigm of corporate
responsibility is that of sustainable development (Ganesh, 2007, 2006; Peterson & Norton, 2007), which
sustainable development as “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the
ability of future generations to meet their own needs‖, and the traditional meaning of CSR has arguably been understood in the same way, as a sustainability of business, profits, resources (both human and material) and the environment necessary to conduct business in (Ganesh, 2006). In fact, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2005) defined CSR in its mission statement very much in terms of sustainability, as “the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life.”

But, like ‘new’ capitalism, sustainability discourse is not value-free and has been regarded as a rehashed version of the old, patriarchal, top-down, pro-Western modernization paradigm of development (Ganesh, 2007; Munshi & Kurian, 2005, 2007). Such arguments take off from Escobar’s (1995) observation that the dominant models of development theory identified and constructed Third World life-situations and beliefs as some things that have to be changed, molded, modified and brought into line with Western standards, rather than appreciated on their own merit. Analyzing the popular sustainability rhetoric on the global stage, Ganesh (2006, 2007) finds metaphors that attempt to foist Western values of family and religion, highly gendered and pro-masculine roles, a clear nexus between government and the private sector, and technocrat ecology-centered discourses that tend to overlook the subaltern non-consuming citizen of the Third World. In a similar vein, Munshi and Kurian (2007) view sustainability through a postcolonial lens to argue that it (and the version of corporate social responsibility it engenders) markedly omits social commitments, promotes the cause of corporate proxies, and glosses over corporate accountability.

An important aspect of sustainable development that has impacted CSR initiatives is the emphasis on scientific methods, technocratic modes of conducting research and evaluation, thereby producing a post-positivist, pro-scientific bias in the discourse of sustainability (Glover, 2007; Peterson, 1997). In the case of a CSR initiative by Monsanto in India, Glover (2007) notes that “non-adoption or slow adoption of new technology is a key signifier of underdevelopment, and the act of technology adoption represents development taking place” (p. 859) – a throwback to the parochial modernization paradigm of
development (see Melkote & Steeves, 2001). This discourse has been further problematized by Peterson and Norton (2007) who note a problematic ambiguity within the Brundtland (1987) definition of sustainability that might mean opposing things to pro- and anti-conservationists. They also highlight the trend of awarding recognition to corporations who honor their sustainability and CSR commitments, which supposedly spurs companies on in the hope of garnering a favorable reputation but also emphasizes the technocrat bias. Sustainability is wedded to the discourse of environmental justice (Agyeman, 2005), which is primarily concerned with the distribution of natural resources, but has been criticized by some quarters as favoring the environment over the interests of indigenous people (see Breen, 2007). For Peterson and Norton (2007), “CSR is essential to achieving SD [sustainable development]” (p. 355), a stance that is surprising given their conclusion in the same essay that sustainable development “has failed to slow the inexorable degradation of environments” (p. 354) and people. However, this paradox becomes tenable when one considers the constitutive play of discourse that they envision in sustainability:

… Sustainability refers to an evolving process, rather than to a static end-state. That evolution is influenced by social practice that is the subject of discourse, and community members must be capable of participating in the discourse. (p. 359)

Participatory discourse then is the constitutive tool that enables corporate responsibility and sustainability to work together. More coherent frameworks of how this may be expected to come about are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The Dominant Paradigm of Corporate Responsibility, or the ‘Business Case’

According to Raman (2007), “the new power of corporate capitalism, born of ideological shifts that include ‘sustainable development’, ‘transparency’, ‘participation’, ‘social capital’, etc., forms part of the current legitimacy of new state orders, raising indeed the necessity to engage with the question of yet another legitimating discursive domain – corporate social responsibility and accountability” (pp. 103-104). The dominant discourse of corporate responsibility, seen through the lens of organizational colonization, may then be considered an offspring of capitalism, globalization, modernization, and sustainability. Often labeled the ‘business case’ (see Bendell, 2005; Blowfield, 2005; Elkington, 1998;
Ganesh, 2007, 2006; Newell, 2005), this model is the most popular among global organizations because it links strategic responsibility of the firm to its stakeholders, ties corporate responsibility to corporate reputation, reports the triple bottom-line, focuses on entering new/under-tapped markets with innovative products, and stresses on garnering consumer goodwill (Bartlett, 2008; Clark, 2000; Freeman, 2006; Miles, Munilla, & Daroch, 2006; Prahalad, 2008; Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008; Wang, 2007). Because there are several precepts common to both public relations and corporate responsibility (Clark, 2000), several corporations tend to regard them as the same. Moreover, Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) landmark work on public relations goes so far as to proclaim that the function of public relations is communicating public responsibility. Munshi and Kurian (2005) note how Frankental declares that “corporate social responsibility is an invention of PR”, and Zorn and Collins (2007) even suggest that popular CSR has “most of the characteristics associated with management fashion” (p. 410), and this might be the only reason for its current popularity: it is simply a fad.

But there are yet others who stress the difference between public relations and corporate responsibility. For instance, Freeman (2006) presents an interesting case where the public relations insider (he is a senior-ranking executive with global PR firm Burson Marsteller) urges companies to shed their “organizational narcissism” (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002), to actually implement pro-community and corporate governance efforts on the ground in keeping with the CSR rhetoric. Also, Clark (2000) proposes a communication-based model of approaching corporate responsibility that emphasizes both media channels (as in the case of public relations) and stakeholder relations (going beyond the conventional public relations concept).

The ‘business case’ may be understood through three major lens of corporate social responsibility, all of which frequently overlap: CSR as voluntary responsibility; the corporation as a citizen with rights (‘corporate citizen’); and the company as responsive to its stakeholders. While Carroll’s (1979) ethical, legal and discretionary responsibilities are often taken as the benchmark for the first lens, this was further extended by Wood (1991) who argued that corporations have three levels of expectations on them: as institutions, as goods-and-service-producing firms, and as moral employer for
workers. This lens is also commonly understood to include “ethical investing”, or investing only in companies that have sound CSR practices (Domini, 2008; Hayes & Walker, 2005).

The second lens of “corporate citizenship” has been appealing for many corporations, as this treats companies as individuals with rights. But it has been criticized by many civil groups and NGOs who prefer the terms “responsibility” or the even stronger “accountability” that would hold business houses accountable for their actions (see Balasubramaniam, Kimber, & Siemensma, 2005; Bendell, 2005; Utting, 2005, Waddock, 2007). As Bendel and Bendel (2007) argue,

…the question must be what political community they [transnational corporations] are subordinate to, what freedoms they are relinquishing, and what benefits there are for them in return, especially given that these corporations are no longer properly governed by nation states.

(p. 69)

For Waddock (2007), the ‘business case’ of corporate citizenship results in too short-term an orientation, an overly narrow focus on citizenship rights, a burgeoning rhetoric-reality gap, and market-encouraged corporate malpractices. At the same time, the potential for a greater nation-building ethic is also evident in the term “corporate citizen”: the citizen participates in and helps shape authoritative structures but then also contributes to the overall mobilization of the larger citizenry or society toward development (Citton, 2008). This attendant aspect of nation-building within corporate citizenship is evident in situations where iconic national companies tout their brand value as ‘homegrown’, and is further discussed in the Indian context in Chapters 3 and 5.

Finally, social responsiveness argues that “organizations should be more flexible and open to accommodating an evolving and dynamic set of social values and needs” (Seeger & Hipfel, p. 157). For all three lens, CSR is framed as voluntary, in accordance with the “free-market fundamentalism” discourse (Conrad, 2003a). A definition that seems to combine all of these would be the one used by Sriramesh, Ng, Ting, and Wanyin (2007), which was obtained from a survey conducted among Asian corporations:
CSR is corporations being held accountable by explicit or inferred social contract with internal and external stakeholders, obeying the laws and regulations of government and operating in an ethical manner which exceeds statutory requirements. (p. 121)

It is important to note that in the above definition, the accounting factor is mere “social contract”, and while the exceeding of “statutory requirements” has been mentioned, this is left entirely to the discretion of individual corporations.

According to Seeger and Hipfel (2007), rather than a law-based framework for CSR, which may be both loosely regulated and easily circumscribed, a corporate responsibility approach grounded in larger moral obligations interpreting and deciding the application of laws would be more effective (pp. 163-164). While this would seem to uphold the voluntary nature of the ‘business case’, it needs to be put in context with what Waddock (2007) labels the “dark side” of corporate citizenship: namely, that the more successful the corporate citizen, the worse its offenses are likely to be. Hence Bendel and Bendel (2007) note, there is an emergent trend where the more socially responsible corporations (or more visible ones, at any rate) are urging for greater industry-wide regulation to level the playing field and move the entire sector onto a trajectory of corporate accountability.

Resisting Silence

Silence and Deconstruction

The systematic privileging of managerialism and organization-sponsored social memory highlights the simultaneous discursive closure or organized silencing of alternative subjects/ positions. Clair (1998) argues that silence is an active performance in itself, as important as communication in the creation of social realities for organizational members. Thus, in detailing the discursive construction of the dominant paradigm or business case of corporate responsibility, the framing of the Other is equally important. In drawing out the organized silence of corporate colonization, Clair (1998) emphasizes four themes: the dialectic between surrounding language/ communication and silence, the diverse signifying practices that occur on both personal and cultural levels to create subjectivities, the interconnectedness of macro/ micro exchanges, and the dialectic of resistance/ oppression that goes beyond the structural or the
postmodern to signify the mundane everyday lived reality of organizational members (pp. 38-45). At stake, therefore, is the sustenance of plurality that is required for forming conflict and resisting organized silence, and a notion of hegemony that taps into the everyday to understand both the privileging of subjects/ actions as well as their abandonment. Conceptualizing hegemony as “a constant struggle in the creation of positions” (p. 51), Clair (1998) details how privileging of positions may occur within the marginalized group itself, between members of different groups (marginalized and/or not), or within everyday practices that link various groups (pp. 57-60). Again, alternative views may be abandoned within the marginalized group, between both marginalized and dominant groups, or within principles linked to the identity of being marginalized (pp. 63-65).

Reiterating that “the site of hegemony is the myriad of everyday institutional activities and experiences that culminate in ‘common sense’” (p. 62), Deetz (1992) elaborates on some of the ways corporate/ organizational power may reduce plurality and thus produce silence: disqualification of actors/ practices from the accepted norm; naturalization of the preferred view and obscuring its socio-historical antecedents; neutralizing the dominant view by denying its power/ value positions; avoiding or discouraging certain topics that are at odds with the preferred view; subjectification of alternative views and refocusing attention from the system to the individual; ambiguity and plausible deniability in intended meaning of the dominant view; legitimation of the preferred view by invoking higher order explanations/ experiences; and, hollow pacification of alternative views by making an apparently reasonable attempt to engage with them (pp. 189-198). To this list, Clair (1998) adds the practice of personalizing/ privatizing alternative discourses, hiding them from the public gaze and thus rendering them uncontestable (p. 39). Other tactics such as the reification of social/ organizational constructions, the universalization of sectional interests, the manufacturing of consent and concertive control, and the dominance of technical rationality also become important in such a context (Deetz, 2005).

In order to resist this organized silencing and restore plurality of subjects/ positions, a renewed focus on conflict (Deetz, 1992, 2005, 2007) and a method of “deconstruction” (Mumby, 1988) are suggested. Deetz (1992) argues that “when discussion is thwarted, a particular view of reality is
maintained at the expense of equally plausible ones, usually to someone’s advantage” (p. 188). Thus, in order to democratize the corporate colonization of the life-world, the emphasis must be on privileging conflict over discursive closure, debate over false consensus, and plurality of views over a single “managerial” and mainstream representation. Underlining the importance of Habermasian “universal pragmatics”, Deetz (2005) reconfigures the consensus/conflict dichotomy to understand “the recovery of conflict as an essential precursor to a new consensus and the perpetual critique of each new consensus as interaction continues” (p. 100). Thus, a framework of corporate responsibility that refrains from organized silencing needs to recognize the limits of productive participation in the conventional sense, stress on micro levels of organizational discourse that retain and propagate contesting ideologies, conceive of empowerment of the Other rather than leadership over him/her, focus on outcomes and interests rather than problems and wants, and engender an inclusive “value debate” that maintains conflicts and diversity of interests rather than seeking common ground (Deetz, 2003, 2007).

Moreover, deconstruction results in “an explicitly political reading of narrative which attempts to overcome a naive acceptance of stories as politically neutral and independent from the socioeconomic structure in which they are articulated” (Mumby, 1988, p. 109). It capitalizes on the gap between the organizational reality the text seeks to provide and the lived reality that organizational members actually experience. The emancipatory potential for deconstruction thus lies within every text, and occurs through legitimate critique and participative interpretation of organizational reality (pp. 162-164).

Importantly, while the frozen/fragmented stories of organization-sponsored social memory (Deetz, 1992) may perpetuate unequal and one-sided power relations, they also contain the necessary strands for deconstruction of plurality and emancipatory viewpoints. For instance, Mumby (1988) notes how the narrative force of a story depends on the sequencing of events, the characterization employed, the authorial role of the narrator, the moral of the story, the underlying value system of the reader(s), the degree of suspension of disbelief, and the story’s ability to produce a cathartic effect (p. 111-113). The moral and imaginative imperative of narratives speaks directly to the constitutive property of discourse in general (and stories in particular), and paves the way for narratives to act simultaneously as a form of
ideological domination and a means of enablement. Moreover, while considering the narrative force of a story, one also needs to consider the dialectic of silence and voice at play; interestingly, as Clair (1998) notes, “this particular dialectical approach is based less on dialectical tension and more on the simultaneous aspects of opposites” (p. 187).

Critiquing Corporate Responsibility

Following these principles of privileging conflict and deconstruction, several scholars have critiqued the dominant paradigm of corporate responsibility. Since “organizations are largely described as political sites dominated by some values at the expense of others” (Deetz, 2005, p. 94), critical-cultural studies of organizations largely focus on the relation of organizations to the wider societal structure and their impact on the public sphere, and intra-organizational processes in terms of domination by instrumental reasoning, discursive closures and consent processes (Clair, 1998; Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 1988). The critical case argues that CSR has been largely manifested as philanthropy, face-saving public relations exercises, or mechanisms to avoid government censure (especially post-Enron), all of which achieve little real development or social change (for instance, see Blowfield, 2005; Conrad, 2003b; Ganesh, 2006; Munshi & Kurian, 2007; Newell, 2005).

The critique against the ‘business case’ may be ordered along three broad lines: (1) the fundamental difference position, (2) the organizational myopia treatise, and (3) the accountability/regulation argument. However, these are by no means mutually exclusive: for instance, because one sees a fundamental difference between CSR and corporations, one might be an avowed proponent of the accountability/ regulation argument.

Fundamental Difference. First, is the position that capitalism, ‘new’ or ‘sustainable’ or otherwise, is fundamentally at odds with the notion of development, and corporations are basically impervious to change. This seems to be the most vehement position against corporate social responsibility, because it tends to see all instances of CSR as a product of public relations, with very little or no substance. Blowfield (2005) argues that despite attempts to reinterpret capitalism, it has certain basic non-negotiable tenets that are at odds with the agenda of development and social change. While asking “why corporate
social responsibility?”, McMillan (2007) answers that “the modern corporation, as constituted, is unfit as a carrier of social responsibility” (p. 16, italics in original) because of its inculcated discourse of managerialism (Deetz, 1992; McMillan, 2007). An even sharper indictment is made by Munshi and Kurian (2005), who aver that “we need to recognize that corporations are unique, powerful institutions whose first and absolute mandate is to make money and enhance profits for their shareholders” (p. 514). They use a postcolonial lens to argue that there is a phenomenon of “capitalics” at play, wherein “a bottom-line obsessed, and largely monocultural (read: Western), ‘developed’ space” (p. 514) dominates the Third World, such that all attempts at CSR are merely a “greenwash”. Hence, Glover (2007) observes that for social change through corporate responsibility to be meaningful, “the ‘underlying theory’ of the corporation needs to undergo a radical transformation” (p. 865).

Cloud (2007) argues that the very term corporate social responsibility is an “oxymoron”. While organizations may use universalization of management themes, illusory workforce participation and other techniques to present a good public image, their best interests are in fact served by the exploitation of workers and employees: “there is a fundamental conflict of interest between the company’s drive for profit and the worker’s standard of living” (p. 227). Extending this idea of a basic conflict of interests to the wider community at large, Breen (2007) suggests that the very presence of a corporation may be harmful to the indigenous people of an area: since the indigenes’ fundamental resource is their intellectual capital and their age-old way of living, the capital offered by a corporation wanting to extract natural resources from that area may be worthless to the indigenes. Such a situation is also argued by Raman (2007) as he details Coca Cola’s exploitation of ground water in rural India, and may arguably apply in the case of Tata Motors Limited and the landless sharecroppers of Singur. Thus, the basic thought behind the fundamental conflict argument may be best expressed by a line from Munshi and Kurian’s (2007) essay: “… if we were to ask if CSR can help make any fundamental change to the “deep structure of world politics”, the answer is likely to remain an emphatic No!” (p. 442, italics in original)

Organizational Myopia. The second broad line of critique against the ‘business case’ is what I call the organizational myopia treatise. Organizational myopia may be understood as “creating a ‘bunker
mentality’ that offers a very management-centric, limited perspective of the firm, its capabilities, and potential futures” (Miles et al., 2006, p. 198), and thus results in the widening of a rhetoric-reality gap between what a company should do and what it actually does – similar to the discursive genre of managerialism (Deetz, 1992). This may also be directly connected to the concept of organizational narcissism, that is, “an organizational identity that results from the simultaneous centralization of self and distancing of others” (Ganesh, 2003, p. 587), which is why Zuboff and Maxmin (2002) argue the individual gets overlooked and relationships get devalued by the organization. Even proponents of the ‘business case’ are attuned to organizational myopia and narcissism, as evidenced by Freeman (2006) advising “a little humility goes a long way toward establishing credibility” (p. 18).

In tune with this position, Frynas (2005) argues that many CSR projects are driven by “short-term expediency rather than the long-term development needs of a community” (p. 585), involve contract managers rather than development specialists, and are hence doomed to failure. The so-called “business case” for CSR does not seek to dismantle the prevalent power structures in terms of knowledge, governance, resource extraction, civil society and so on, and in fact upholds them (Blowfield, 2005; Utting, 2005). In his analysis of the institutional discourse in the aftermath of the 2002 U.S. “corporate meltdown”, Conrad (2003b) finds that rather than attempt a genuine system-wide investigation, both policymakers and corporations sought to symbolically placate stakeholders, redefined the victim to include a lesser number of affected people, termed it an accounting issue instead of a corporate governance problem, and individualized the crisis by absolving the system (for instance, see White & Otterman, 2008). Thus, organizational myopia results in corporate responsibility discourse “that defines an issue in such a way that minimizes its popular appeal, or that draws on culturally sanctioned assumptions to frame reform in such a way that makes it seem objectionable” (p. 551). Another case in point is Livesey’s (2002) analysis of oil giant Shell’s CSR initiatives in Nigeria, where she concludes that despite affirming its commitment to the local communities, Shell retained elements of the dominant modernization discourse (see Melkote & Steeves, 2001), which reiterates the primacy of profit, markets, top-down communication models and industrial growth over real social change.
Because organizational myopia favors short-term resolutions, scholars also note that a broad and often superficial consensus is stressed over underlying conflict and differing subjects/positions (Deetz, 2007, 1992; Miles et al., 2006). While commenting on the popular trend of co-regulation among transnational corporations, international bodies like the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, Utting (2005) remarks,

…the longevity of capitalism has to do with the ability of ruling elites to govern not through force but through consensus, exercising moral, cultural, and intellectual leadership, and entering into relations with civil society that cultivate certain values and opinions conducive to stability and the rejection of ‘radical’ alternatives. (p. 380)

Moreover, the ‘business case’ and organizational myopia views companies as apolitical or beyond politics, treating development and social change as a job for the government, preferring instead one-off shows of philanthropy that tend to remove corporations from the socio-political discursive space of accountability (Blowfield, 2005; Livesey, 2002).

**Accountability/ Regulation.** Accountability is a major theme for the critique of corporate social responsibility. Despite the power of “free market fundamentalism” (Conrad, 2003a), the very real limitations of voluntary book-keeping such as “ethical investing” (Hayes and Walker, 2005) and “conscientious consumerism” (Kendall, Gill, & Cheney, 2007) may not be ignored. Voluntary initiatives do not probe either the layered reality of inequality or the structural system that propagates it (Lund-Thomsen, 2003), and in fact, there is a frequent (and convenient) blurring of the lines between corporations’ voluntary and mandatory actions (Prieto-Carron, Lund-Thomsen, Chan, Muro, & Bhushan, 2006). Bendell (2005) notes, through his case studies, the tendency of multinational CSR practices to treat the under-development in Third World locales as Other and divorced from its own reality. Hence, Utting (2005) argues for more stress on regulation and greater democracy within the notion of accountability. The alternative “corporate accountability” framework he suggests “goes beyond voluntary approaches by demanding a new articulation of voluntary initiatives and law… and recognizes that if CSR is to be
meaningful it needs to be articulated with social change and cannot rely exclusively on individual effort or agency” (pp. 384-385).

An “instrumental policy behavior process” is suggested by Breen (2007), who “insists on policy action in cases where there is either (a) an absence of CSR or (b) unethical behavior touted as CSR” (p. 297). Breen’s processual model is based on the idea of empowerment (see Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006), such that it sees a gradual transition of the indigenous people’s situation from one of repression by the corporation to revolt, reform, resource allocation and regulation, a review of measures, and finally to a recoupment of ground and then reinvention, “where they are able to consciously decide how they live and under what conditions” (p. 298). Interestingly enough, while the stress is on regulation and accountability, there is an absence of naiveté here, that is, expecting things and positions to go back to ‘the way they used to be’, if for no other reason than that corporations, globalization and other macro-forces will not let that happen.

The accountability/ regulation position is thus keenly aware of situations of power inequity within the organization-society-individual mix. It goes a step beyond the organizational myopia route, by arguing not only that the corporation needs to broaden its horizon, but also that it needs to be monitored actively throughout the process, because its efforts tend naturally to be superficial (Munshi & Kurian, 2005). Accountability, however, does not necessarily mean accountability to the State here. In fact, most of the proponents of this approach view an alliance between the agencies of the State and corporations, akin to Deetz’s (1992) “corporate colonization”. Garvey and Newell (2005) posit that in most cases, either the government/ regulator is lax or deliberately turns a blind eye to the non-ethical activities of corporations. This is especially true for the non-consuming majority of the Third World who may not partake of the ‘new’ global economy (Munshi & Kurian, 2007), and the indigenous people who are affected by a corporation’s intrusion in their lands (Breen, 2007).

Proponents of the accountability framework argue that corporations have a problematic relationship with the State: on one hand, they form a nexus of the elites, yet on the other, their CSR initiatives providing humanitarian and other social necessities tend to undermine the State, positing the
corporation as a kind of pseudo-center. Relying on a voluntary framework means that corporations obtain this privilege of rights, without any accompanying responsibilities or any real accountability (Bendel & Bendel, 2007). Frynas (2005) goes so far as to say

By implication, it is arguable that CSR may provide a lose-lose outcome for a country’s governance; governance failures lead to calls for a role of CSR in development; usually CSR is unable to play such a positive developmental role, but even if CSR could play such a role, this would ease the pressure on the government to undertake a developmental role itself. (p. 596)

Moreover, as Blowfield (2005) puts it, an important side-effect is “how a ‘business-like’ mindset affects the way we think about development, and the consequences of managing development in a ‘business-like’ fashion” (p. 521). Thus, the tendency to think of development projects in terms of quantitative business models, calculable risks, coherent timeframes, acceptable losses and renewable investment is a great danger to development and social change. This is considered much worse than the top-down modernization paradigm of the 1950s and ‘60s, as it tends to absolve governments and aid agencies for their failures, letting them off the proverbial hook.

Accountability may be contested as well, and several scholars point out that not just the State, but also non-government organizations that supposedly represent affected communities need to be problematized in terms of their real interests. Thus, accountability in the critical framework includes not just legal binds but more importantly, “a regulatory framework needs to be complemented with movements in civil society”, resulting in “critical watchdog roles for activists and local communities” (Ganesh, 2007, p. 387). Critical scholars point to the surge of grassroots resistance movements against corporations across the world, which they regard as a rejection of corporate social responsibility practices and failures. Newell (2005) cites case studies in India, where community resistance movements rose against two corporations that purported to follow the diktat of the UN Global Compact (see www.unglobalcompact.org) on paper. Lund-Thomsen (2005) uses case studies from South Africa to argue that neither CSR nor corporate accountability succeed in bringing about community-led social change, and may even be antithetical to the same. Instead, while governments and corporations exploit the
prevalent power structure to effectively disenfranchise already marginalized poor communities, community-led resistance may ensure a more equitable social change and development.

Even though a critique of the dominance paradigm of corporate responsibility identifies several areas of organized silencing and erosion of plurality, there is still further room for deconstruction. Prieto-Carron, Lund-Thomsen, Chan, Muro, and Bhushan (2006) posit,

So long as the debate continues to emphasize the business case for CSR, focuses on win-win situations, promotes multi-stakeholder dialogues with consensus outcomes and highlights the advantages of public-private partnerships where actors work towards achieving mutually agreed goals, we see a need to raise the banner of critical perspectives. (pp. 978-979)

Voicing Dissent

While describing the work of critical scholars, Deetz (2005) notes the importance of not just being filled with “care” for the outside, that is, centered on the Other, but also filled with “thought”, or a critical reflection of the system within, and “good humor”, or the ability to recognize the unintentional and ironic randomness of the universe (pp. 101-104). A framework of corporate responsibility may then be attempted that takes into account the unequal play of corporate/organizational power, tries to lay guidelines for a suitable deconstruction of such silencing, yet in voicing dissent also recognizes the inherent potential of corporate responsibility in an age of organizational colonization. For instance, Christensen (2007) suggests that a critique of CSR should combine efforts to deconstruct dominant discourse and seriously consider the current work corporations do, rather than tarring all corporations as “adversaries”. Even Zorn and Collins (2007), who term CSR a “management fashion”, consider the very real possibility that “adoptions that may initially have been fashion driven may ultimately be driven by necessities of survival and as a result, become a permanent way of life” (p. 413).

While these frameworks look at CSR from a variety of perspectives – macro/ micro, local/ global – they tend to agree on three major issues: firstly, that individuals, society and organizations are relationally and inextricably linked to each other and CSR must take note of this; secondly, discourse is constitutive and adaptive, with properties that go beyond the intentions behind its original form; thirdly,
stakeholder dialogue is emphasized, in as close to a power-neutral situation as possible (the frameworks are pragmatic enough to admit that a completely power-neutral zone is implausible), so that conflict and not consensus is the goal. As I discuss some of these frameworks, I do so under three broad heads: (1) the set that examines the area of influence of corporations, both global and local, from a plane similar to Escobar’s (2000) place/space perspective; (2) the set that emphasizes the constitutive value of discourse to frame values and actions; and (3) the set that I label the “enhanced stakeholder” theories, because they see a greatly expanded role for stakeholders that goes beyond mere accountability/regulation.

Space/Place Frameworks

The discursive dichotomy of place versus space is an important theme of development theory, and is most famously teased by Arturo Escobar (2000, 1995). For Escobar (2000), place refers to “the particular site or location where people’s lives and experiences are actually lived, becoming essential for thinking about identity, development, social movements, and the like” (p. 165). But, with the advent of globalization and network society, there has come to be an “erasure of place” by the looming of space, which may be understood as “the absolute and the universal” (p. 167). In such a situation, power is dispersed throughout the social body, simultaneously produced and contested, and Escobar (2000) reasons, the only way to not ignore the import of the local context and the Other, is to re-imbed nodes of place within the spatial network, thus resulting in the production of what Dirlik (2001) terms “glocalities”. A set of theoretical frameworks on CSR that voice dissent seems to emphasize the re-imbeddedness of space/place. For instance, Lammers (2003) suggests an “institutional perspective” on corporate social responsibility that is at once local (in that it talks about corporate discourses) as it is structural (by considering systemic norms); Stohl, Stohl and Townsley (2007) highlight the emergence of a glocalized corporate responsibility; and McMillan (2007) suggests a contemporary model of CSR based on creating a “mutual dwelling place” for stakeholders. Each of these may be briefly considered in turn.

Lammers (2003) calls for a broader theory on corporate responsibility that recognizes both internal and environmental compulsions, larger issues of corporate governance, an extra-organizational
perspective, new scales of communication channels and messages, and the reality of competing/contradictory value norms.

The main emphasis of the institutional perspective is a focus on the value and regulatory environments of organizations. In general, the institutional perspective views organizational communication as a process by which norms are both adopted and acted on by organizational members. (p. 620)

In particular, an institutional perspective looks at the co-optation of elements/values in the policy-determining structure of an organization to avert threats; rational myths that cross institutional boundaries and give law-like force to customs/practices (for instance, Conrad’s, 2003a, “free market fundamentalism”); isomorphism or bureaucratic similarity across organizational structures in terms of mimesis, coercive methods and spread of norms; and institutional structuration or the mutual awareness of being embedded in a system (pp. 621-622).

The notion of the “glocal” is more explicitly encountered in Stohl, Stohl and Townsley’s (2007) third-generation theory of global CSR that “is responsive to multiple cultures, value sets, and communicative practices of different nations while recognizing that (inter)organizational contexts are no longer bounded by the nation-state” (p. 34). This may be understood on one level as the “sweatshop” politics against Nike and the Gap (Bendel & Bendel, 2007), but more importantly, the need to be aware of global indicators of a lack of corporate responsibility: for instance, the chance to clamp down on Enron long before the 2002 “meltdown”, because of its high-handedness in India in the 1990s (Stohl et al., 2007). Global CSR theory has some defining characteristics: it does not differentiate between “out there” and “in here”, it takes into account “the reflexive changes in identities of people and groups” (p. 36), it recognizes that there is no longer a monopoly on media sources by any one entity, it considers both short and long term consequences, it is galvanized through networks and other “hybrid organizational forms” (p. 38), it recognizes multiple stakeholders beyond the balance sheet, and it takes note of the relational nature of private/public and personal/professional worlds. In re-ordering corporate responsibility, the theory gives place of pride to communication, both in terms of social mobilization/resistance and
constitutive discourse/ values, holding steadfast to the notion of “grassroots globalization from below” (see Appadurai, 2000).

The ancient Greek concept of ethos has been appropriated by McMillan (2007), to stand for a participative “mutual dwelling place” that encourages stakeholders – both insiders and outsiders – to “feel at home” and discuss issues constructively. Her notion of ethos is presented as a means to steer clear of organizational narcissism, as it “does not just speak its self-interested agenda; it listens, as well, especially to those most vulnerable to corporate conduct” (p. 24). Using the concept of “corporate ecology” (Cyphert & Saiia, 2004), that is, the concentration and redistribution of resources, McMillan’s theory of a “mutual dwelling place” attempts to navigate stakeholder interests in a supportive, representative environment that at once privileges the corporate space and the stakeholder’s place. Munshi and Kurian (2007) would extend the concept of ethos by “the creation/ enforcement of regulatory frameworks that are embedded with the norms” (p. 444) and ideas of home.

Constitutive Discourse Frameworks

While several critical scholars complain about the “façade” of CSR (Munshi & Kurian, 2005), Christensen (2007) posits that “postmodernity invites us to step into the reality of appearances themselves, to understand the interplay and polysemy of signifiers and the creative (or destructive) forces of communication itself” (p. 451) – that is, understand what the façade itself signifies. Thus, frameworks emphasizing the role of constitutive discourse and values argue that “CSR is not a dead metaphor”, and even the dialogue-façade of CSR is “a powerful signifier that can be used by both management and employees to demand more communication and participation… since talk is action, too, such solutions may sometimes be regarded as adequate by some stakeholders” (Christensen, 2007, pp. 453-454).

Livesey and Graham (2007) extend Judith Butler’s (1993) notion of performativity to the corporate responsibility discourse and “eco-talk” of corporations such as Shell. They argue that, despite the original intentions behind such “eco-talk”, corporate reflexivity comes into play as a result of the “story-telling” on CSR and participatory modes of discussion. Thus,
We do not want to suggest, however, that corporate eco-talk or the innovative practices that flowed from it necessarily signify unidirectional corporate progress toward sustainability, for we do not see sustainable development as a fixed goal or set of technical outcomes. Rather, it is a value that informs ongoing ethical practice. As such, it must (and will) be continually defined and redefined in local skirmishes and political contexts both within and outside the corporation, struggles that have transforming effects on corporate identities, values and modes of operation. We argue that this is how sustainability is actually performed – in other word, how it is made a reality at the level of the corporation, and how it potentially becomes hegemonic (although necessarily contested) at the level of society as a whole. (p. 337)

Thus, the researchers see a relational context between the corporation, society and individuals, which recognizes the role of discourse in shaping values and actions. Their essay is also interesting, given that the first author had previously published an article on Shell’s operations in Nigeria that argued a continued reliance on the ‘business case’ and imperfect dialogue with stakeholders, despite the company’s avowed intentions to do the same (Livesey, 2002). In this essay, however, Sharon Livesey (together with Julie Graham) adopts a more pragmatic tone and echoes Christensen’s (2007) stand that social change comes about via the constitutive nature of organizational “talk”.

The relationship between discourse, values and action has also been examined in Ketola’s (2008) “holistic corporate responsibility” model, which stresses on virtue ethics (borrowed from Aristotle) that lead to a discursive defense of sublimation or “a constructive form of concession” (p. 424) to stakeholders and accountability, which might then result in an “ideal” case where economic, social and ecological responsibilities are upheld. Ketola’s alternative cases consider utilitarian, duty or right-bound ethics systems, which result in discursive defenses of excuses, refusals, justifications or self-reproach – all of which result in situations ranging from the “suicidal” (does not pay attention to corporate responsibilities at all) to the “matriarchal” (emphasizes socio-ecological aims over economic ones, resulting in unsustainable business models). While the model might appear to be highly instrumental and/ or deterministic, Ketola (2008) admits that “the reality of business is not quite as simple” (p. 431) and the
ever-contested pull of values and discourses may result in a number of unclassified cases; however, “in a virtue ethical company, responsible values, discourses and actions reinforce each other as a result of constant mutual feedback” (p. 432). In her case studies on three large multinationals based in Finland, she also factors in globalization forces and various strategies, operations and feedback measures implemented by the companies – coming up with an innovative framework that might be useful for consideration by both academics and CSR practitioners.

Enhanced Stakeholder Frameworks

Stakeholder theory engages directly with the issue of voicing dissent by subjects/ positions Other than the dominant one. The stakeholder approach became popular following R. Edward Freeman’s (1984) seminal work *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, which visualized the general public as primary and secondary stakeholders in organizational decisions, going beyond the traditional investor-shareholder monopoly. Thus, stakeholders are seen to be “all the groups and individuals that have an effect on or are affected by the accomplishment of an organizational purpose” (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). This conception has since then been extended and enhanced.

For instance, Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) aver that “the social individual exists only in relation to others and ‘the other’ is considered in the development of conduct leading to common content and a community of meaning” (p. 49). Thus, they hold “participative communication” as the ideal that will lead to both communicative validity and moral discourse of CSR. In this, they follow Habermas’ (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action, and its “universal pragmatics” or validity claims of truth, sincerity, understandability, and appropriateness. While they aver that several global CSR standards for corporations hold true to these “universal pragmatics”, there are additional hurdles to cross for the discourse to be considered “moral”: namely, that corporate responsibility reporting should be general/inclusive of all stakeholders, allow autonomous evaluation by stakeholders, facilitate role-playing or empathy by everyone at the discussion table, guarantee transparency by/ for all, and finally be power-neutral. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that “participative communication” is not without its own paradoxes of power inequity (see Cloud, 2007; Stohl & Cheney, 2001), and therefore should not be
embraced uncritically either. Instead, a conflict-enhanced stakeholder theory that maintains conflicts and diversity of interests rather than seeking common ground (Deetz, 1992, 2003, 2007) is suggested to voice dissent and resist organizational colonization.

Deetz’s (2003) comment that “social responsibility is found in fostering particular communicative micro practices in everyday work contexts” (p. 610) is exemplified in the theory of strategic communication with stakeholders, by scholars such as Haas (2003) and Miles, Munilla and Darroch (2006). For Haas (2003), the new risks posed by modern society involve both “the destructive effects that corporate actions are already incurring on human beings and the nonhuman world of nature and, equally important, to the anticipated future effects of those actions” (p. 613). Referring to the withdrawal of Tylenol by Johnson & Johnson in the early 1980s, he argues that present-day corporations need to exercise both “social rationality” and scientific calculation, while debating the “risk” posed to themselves and their stakeholders, in the present and in the future. The “ethics of futurity” proposed by him would thus seem to marry Brundtland’s (1987) notion of sustainability with the power inequity recognition of the ‘critical case’, highlighting the need for stakeholders to be engaged in “actual and stimulated conversations… when the effects of actions are predicted to be far removed in space or time and/ or include the nonhuman world of nature” (pp. 616-617). Thus, there are traces of the space/place duality in this framework as well.

Stakeholder conversations are also seen as a way to avoid organizational myopia and narcissism by Miles, Munilla and Darroch (2006). Such “strategic conversations are dynamic and recursive in nature, resulting in an increase in both the quantity and quality of information and technology transfers between the various stakeholders of the firm, BSEs [boundary spanning employees], and top management” (p. 199). The researchers identify two main information-cum-perception gaps that strategic conversations might close: the performance/capability gap between various stakeholders’ perception of the corporation’s current CSR performance and its future CSR capabilities; and the futures gap between various stakeholders’ perceptions of the “most probable” future, the “ideal” future, and the firm’s role in the creation of these futures (p. 201).
In-group stakeholder conversations are studied by O’Connor, Shumate and Meister (2008), who note that stakeholders not only tend to see corporate responsibility in terms of comparative degree, but also have expectations for what constitutes authentic CSR and what does not. In this respect, stakeholders co-create an organizational reality of corporate responsibility, rather than tamely accept whatever organizations craft for them – thus, stakeholder conversation might present a limitation to organizational colonization and corporate power. According to their findings, organizations are judged by anthropomorphic characteristics like honesty, integrity and character, while concerns such as longevity, accountability and social commitments determine how CSR initiatives are considered.

Finally, the “enhanced stakeholder” framework emphasizes various degrees of collaboration between communities and corporations or NGOs, ranging from a complete partnership between the two to an antagonistic relationship between them. For instance, Bendel’s (2005) theory of “stakeholder democracy” argues the need for CSR agents to be actively embedded in the local community/environment that corporate social responsibility is meant for, and more effective representation on decision-making bodies for the same. Both Bendel (2005) and Utting (2005) note the trend of multi-stakeholder initiatives in the global/local arenas that co-opt the radical agendas of community and civic groups within the corporate set-up and the “uncomfortable compromise” (Bendel, 2005, p. 371) therein. For Bendel (2005), “the ability of a system of democracy by stakeholder groups to deliver individual democratic rights depends on those stakeholder groups themselves being democratic” (p. 372), so that the power-dynamics in such situations and the rhetoric-reality gap needs to come into sharp focus. An enhanced stakeholder approach for Utting (2005) would focus on corporate accountability and a system of regulation “that facilitates the task of identifying, investigating, publicizing and seeking redress for specific instances” (p. 386) of responsibility failure. Moreover, noting that a single (or two or three or four…) corporation’s good work in the CSR arena would not succeed in changing a globally dire situation with immense forward and backward linkages, Bendel and Bendel (2007) expect to “witness [more cases of] a new type of partnership between business and civil groups that aim at changing the
framework conditions of markets, including government regulations” (p. 69) – thus producing a convergence, of sorts, between community stakeholder and corporation interests, in some cases.

In other cases, however, the need for constant community mobilization as a defensive and even pro-active role remains strong. Munshi and Kurian (2005) stress the “need to break down the hierarchy of publics and take into account the resistance of marginalized public” (p. 518), and recognize that “some companies are involved in work that is inherently damaging” and so they must be monitored/ resisted continuously. Frynas (2005) argues that new CSR frameworks need to emphasize empowerment and thus break the “dependency mentality” (p. 590) fostered by earlier CSR projects that did not consult with local communities. Livesey (2002), for instance, details the case of Shell in South America, where the company consults local communities, after receiving much flak for its operations in Nigeria.

In scenarios of the “enhanced stakeholder” framework where the community seeks to ameliorate corporate power, successful community mobilization efforts often involve strategic ties with like-minded groups (see Escobar, 2000), the construction of alternative livelihoods that do not depend on the corporation in question, and the resolving of in-group problems so that they may not be exploited by corporate power, and democratic representation within the community (Garvey & Newell, 2005). Newell (2005) suggests some other community mobilization methods that may be utilized: empirically exposing the link between corporate activities and the impacts felt by local communities, providing empirical proof of experiential knowledge to counter pro-technocrat systems (see Peterson, 1997), providing people’s development plans as an alternative to the development initiative offered by myopic corporations, strengthening multi-stakeholder initiatives on a community basis, establishing intra-community accountability, and developing anticipatory mechanisms that may be used to identify undesirable impacts in advance of a corporate operation being set up.

In conclusion, a framework of corporate responsibility that voices dissent and resists organizational silencing must be as much inward-searching as it is outward-seeking, macro as it is micro. As Bendel and Bendel (2007) comment, “facing corporate power means that many of us have to face
ourselves” (p. 70). In this study, I look at society/ community/ organization in sum, as an interlinked phenomenon, where even ‘talk’ achieves something concrete as it discursively shapes values and actions.
CHAPTER 3

GLOBALIZATION, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND
CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY IN THE INDIAN FIRM

The various meanings and impacts of globalization form an intertwined strand to understand the ethics of corporate responsibility and organizational culture in Asian multinational corporations. In the first and second sections of this chapter, I describe a dialectical way of approaching globalization and organizational culture, respectively, to understand how corporate responsibility is affected by them. In the third section, further dialectical streams such as Gandhian ethics, post-independence Nehruvian policy and post-reforms liberalization are examined to understand the historical emergence of the prevalent organizational culture(s) in Indian firms. In the last section, I draw the various strands together to understand the confluence of ethics that affect corporate responsibility in India, and the current situation and future trends of CSR in the country. Of particular interest are arguments that the so-called ‘business case’ (see Chapter 2) has failed in India, the need to mainstream CSR with normal business operations of Indian firms, and the inherent task of nation-building that Indian CSR is expected to accomplish. Finally, before launching into the method of my analysis in Chapter 4, I briefly re-state the research questions.

Conceptualizing Globalization

Thomas Friedman (1996), the notable proponent of globalization, likened it to a “brakeless train”. Scholars have taken a remarkable array of positions on the virtues and vices of globalization, and while it is beyond the scope of this study to ponder over each of these, it is important to consider some of the prominent literature on the meaning of globalization, the nature of its propagation or spread, and finally the potential and realized impacts of globalization.

Nature and Meaning of Globalization

First, there is the meaning of the term: Robertson and Khondker (1998) observe that the word “globalization” is used regularly by mainstream media across the world, but without a clear meaning accompanying the usage. Thus, they propose a definition of globalization as “the compression of the
entire world, on the one hand, and a rapid increase in consciousness of the whole world, on the other” (p.29). While Giddens (1990) declared that globalization was a product of modernity (and by extension a Western product), and Ritzer (1995) famously declared that the “McDonaldization” of the world was underway, Robertson and Khondker (1998) are adamant that globalization not be mistaken for Westernization. On the contrary, there is a clear need to identify reciprocal forces of globalization, from the non-West to the West, in addition to the more popular idea of a West-based spread. A slightly different frame is employed by Appadurai (1996, 2000) who views globalization as “flows of disjuncture”; for example, ideas of “modern” roles of women in the 21st century juxtaposed against “traditional” or “authentic” roles to be played. Thus, for Appadurai (2000),

The various flows we see – of objects, persons, images, and discourses – are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent. They are… flows of disjuncture… Further, these disjunctures themselves precipitate various kinds of problems and frictions in different local situations. (p. 5)

He (1996) presents five major flows of disjunctures to consider: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes, which represent mass migrations of people, changing images of media, strident advances by technology, global pursuit of money, and enhanced forms of ideology, respectively. Each of these are self-reinforcing and contesting in ways determined by the context they act in. While these ‘scapes’ may be considered potent forms of imagination to be used for resisting hegemonic structures, they lack “a clear picture… of the political, economic, pedagogic advantages of globalization” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 17) – that is, they lack the know-how to work the dominant system. The suggested way out of this spiraling “chaos” is a kind of “grassroots globalization”, where the relevant pedagogies are imparted to those who need them by imagined groups based on day-to-day ties (Appadurai, 1996, 2000).

Aside from the meaning of globalization, the nature of its spread has also come into question: is it naturally occurring or artificially propagated; or a more fundamental question – is it new or old? Scholars such as Arrighi (1998) contend that globalization has “important historical precedents”, while Harvey
labeled it as “nothing more than a promotional gimmick to make the best of a necessary adjustment in the system of international finance” (p. 8). Nevertheless, the problem of simply classifying globalization as a mere continuation of age-old trade and transfer of cultural traits has been duly noted (Appadurai, 2000; Robertson & Khondker, 1998; Shome & Hegde, 2002), and it is a general consensus that while historically influenced, globalization (as we know it today) is not comparable to any sort of inter-cultural transfer of previous ages. Rather than a never-ending debate as to the question of origin, it has been better served to mark the crucial difference between globalization the ongoing process versus globalization the historical project. In this respect, Robertson and Khondker (1998) provide an interesting example of the French intellectuals’ drive to resist “Anglo-American culture” as a concerted, well-thought out project, rather than the larger process that globalization really is. Another factor that the authors highlight within the process is agency: they thus differ from Giddens’ (1990) notion of a passively accepting host. The notion of agency is also upheld in Appadurai’s (1990, 1996) theory, where globalization is (re)propagated by a “community of sentiment”, fueled by collective imagination – which seems similar to Benedict Anderson’s (1991) theory of “imagined communities”. Imagination thus becomes a “constitutive feature of modern subjectivity” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 3), because it transcends from the extraordinary individual to the ‘ordinary’ collective, goes beyond mere dissipative fantasy to form a ready fuel for social action, and thereby emphasizes collective agency.

Multiple Impacts

The “brakeless train” metaphor – and other characterizations of the inevitable nature of globalization – has resulted in two main popular ideas: American imperialism in terms of culture or politics or both, and the eventual disintegration of the nation-state (Meyer, 1980). Shome and Hegde (2002) negate the idea of the Americanization of the globe, noting (as do Robertson and Khondker, 1998, though Appadurai, 1996, does admit to a fear of absorption of the micro/ smaller by the macro/ larger entity) multiple influences traversing the world, in addition to the North American or European ones. Instead, using a critical lens to study the impact of globalization on culture, they maintain that culture is (and always has been) the site of struggle, and globalization now brings with it the issue of space-
disturbances, with its own connotations for the (re)constructions and (re)interpretations of the narrative of “difference” and the subaltern. Thus,

… if the subaltern were able to redistribute herself (that is, access and reposition herself across different spatial fields of power instead of fixed by them), then the subaltern would perhaps not be subaltern… Communication scholars need to pay attention to the social, cultural, and political ramifications of the “connections” enabled by globalization (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 181, italics in original).

In a similar vein, Fairclough and Thomas (2004) argue that the discourse of globalization and the globalization of discourse (organizational or otherwise) operate dialectically, so that the process of crystallization of the idea(s) to its/their translation depends in a large part on how it/they are appropriated locally. In effect, “the inherent unpredictability and uncertainty of the translation process is a reason for optimism, for it suggests that discourses that appear to be dominant and hegemonic may not be so” (p. 394).

On the salience of the nation-state, Robertson and Khondker (1998) argue that the nationalist fabric is very much intact, as “the nation-state has developed as an aspect of globalization, considered a long-term historical process” (p. 30). For instance, Stohl and Stohl (2005) use the network theory of structural holes to show that despite the emergence of various international and national NGOs to fill the gaps left wanting by nation-states, their success eventually leads to the strengthening of the fabric of nationhood. This is also corroborated by political philosophers like Anthony Smith (2001), who states that despite the powers of greater imagining occasioned by deeper penetration of global mass communication, they “have not rendered borders obsolete or diminished the regulatory and supervisory controls of the national state” (p.125); even where there have been some selection or reinterpretation of symbols and traditions, these have been “always within the parameters and authentic spirit of existing cultures and communities” (p. 133).

Appadurai (1996) argues, however, that “the material problems we face – the deficit, the environment, abortion, race, drugs, and jobs – … define those social groups and ideas for which we
would be willing to live, and die‖ (p. 176), and thus produce “locality” in various post-national groups that may well be at odds with the nation-state. For “grassroots globalization” to occur, the emergence and empowerment of these groups, in terms of knowledge and capital, are essential to tackle effectively the “flows of disjuncture”. Extending this treatise, Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney (2005) theorize on the essential linkage between individual effort and collective resistance to formulate a praxis of resistance to the hegemonic flows of globalization, bringing into effect a model of “globalization from below” that is able to transform power relations. The authors struggle to enable local resistance to take on a macro role, “to effect large-scale, collective changes in the domains of state policy, corporate practice, social structure, cultural norms, and daily lived experience” (p. 177).

These positions on globalization are useful in the framing of the research questions of this study. Firstly, a framework of globalization related to imagined ties/links/dialectics clearly sets the stage for the effectiveness of constitutive discourse on culture. Discourse thus not only reflects reality, but plays a part in creating it. Secondly, by repudiating a simplistic view of globalization as a dominant force in favor of a framework that sees “flows of disjuncture” affecting time/space allows me to examine the issue of the re-framing of the organizational dissident along these lines. Such a re-framing of the alternative subject/position is clearly important in deconstructing organized silencing through corporate colonization, and blends well with the theory of corporate/organizational power (Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 1988).

Globalization, Organizational Culture and Corporate Responsibility

In this section, I focus on the cultural aspects of globalization in terms of the impacts it has for emerging economy multinational corporations. Stohl (2001) argues that culture “is not a thing that can be managed, controlled, or contained but rather a constitutive feature of organizing” (p. 366). Reviewing the literature on cultural globalization in organization studies, she demarcates between the convergence and the divergence perspectives: convergence assumes that organizations across the globe use similar actions, messages and processes that function in similar ways, while the divergence literature opines that similar communicative actions may arise from different interpretations and ideas (Stohl, 2001, 2005). However, the exclusive use of either perspective is not conducive for a proper analysis of global organizations,
Stohl contends, suggesting instead a judicial blend of elements common to them both. Noting that “the principal challenge of globalization is related to issues of inequality” (Stohl, 2005, p. 241), she emphasizes the role of communication in constructing organizational reality via globalization:

Communication is an interpretive symbolic process that plays a constitutive role in shaping individual identity and organizational reality. Globalization is intersubjectively constructed and meaningfully evolves as individuals, groups, and organizations struggle to survive and compete across the world stage. (p. 241)

Traditionally culture has been studied through the lens of the “culture as shared values” or the “global-culture” approach, which assumes that individual businesspersons conform fully to the culture and practices of their own group (Triandis, 1976). Some of the most famous studies in this vein were those conducted by Hofstede (1980, 1983), who classified up to 53 national cultures along four markers: power distance (large versus small), uncertainty avoidance (strong versus weak), individualism (versus collectivism) and masculinity (versus femininity). But, as Zaidman (2001) points out in her analysis of Indo-Israeli business discourse, “the limitations of the global culture approach are that complexity and variation in communication patterns are often ignored and the approach is insensitive to adaptation of communication strategies” (p. 410). Instead, she suggests the “culture-in-context” approach, and its offshoot, the discourse/practice methodology, to examine cultural influences in organizational communication.

Such a context-based view of organizational culture also keeps in mind the limitations of culture to explain variations and developments in organizational strategy. Using Indian organizations as an example, Singh (2007) points to the considerable in-group differences within various regions and organizations of India, so that a blanket claim of ‘Indian organizational culture’ becomes untenable. Instead, he argues that culture is “better conceptualized as a background institution which frames or moulds other institutions, which then impact strategy more directly” (p. 425), and it is a framework that focuses on “regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive aspects of institutional environments” (p. 424) that best describes organizational strategy. Singh’s (2007) institutional environment treatise is based on
the co-creation of social reality, which depends in no small part on the social links/ties of an organization and organizational members. As Townsley and Stohl (2003) argue, neither “cultural relativism” alone, nor the “disembedding of local relationships and the emergence of new global alignments, actors and discourses of responsibility apart from location” (p. 604), suffice to understand organizational culture and corporate responsibility norms. A similar idea is apparent in Jameson’s (2007) conceptualization of cultural identity, which involves a historical perspective, focuses on the dialectical exchange of knowledge/values between generations, is affected by social ties, may evoke emotions, evolves over time, is closely intertwined with power/privilege, and is negotiated via communication (pp. 218-225).

Such a dialectical relationship between cultural identity and organizational culture, in the theatre of globalization, has been upheld by empirical studies as well. Nelson and Gopalan (2003) note, organizations may achieve a sort of balance between organizational culture and cultural identity. In their study of firms belonging to three countries (the U.S., Brazil and India), they construct the idea of reciprocal opposition, whereby “the oppositional group adopts symbols and social structures that are the reciprocal opposite of those used by the dominant groups” (p. 1120). Through interviews and survey methods, the authors construct first the dominant culture, i.e. what the respondents perceived their national culture or cultural identity to be, and then the reciprocal culture traits that were seen to operate in the organizations of these countries. Related to India, they found a large “modernizing cluster” directly in reciprocal opposition to what was perceived as the dominant/national culture. India also had the most diverse sub-cultural clusters, indicating a wide variety of competing ideologies. In a similar vein, Lin and Clair (2007) examine the adaptation of Maoist philosophy in Chinese firms, noting how the principles impacted issues like leadership style, conflict management, problem solving, model workers, etc., all the while rubbing shoulders with a more “global” business style. Both these studies indicate multiple “flows of disjuncture”, rather than either convergence or divergence (as pointed out by Stohl, 2001). Secondly, despite the obvious shortcomings of a uniform national culture approach to globalization, the studies show that people do have pre-formed perceptions of what their cultural identity is and what it demands of them – and though this is often taken to be akin to national culture, it may not be permanent.
The communication of corporate responsibility norms and organizational ethics may be understood as a component of the organizational culture of a firm (Hollihan & Riley, 1989), which itself is thus subject to the dialectical play of cultural identity, social relationships, national traditions, globalization and so on. Examining the online communication of corporate responsibility by ten Mexican companies well-known for their CSR work, Perez-Chavarria (2007) concludes that even though there is a marked lack of “a true CSR strategy” (p. 147),

… CSR is seemingly affected by national and even regional differences. Both local practices and the characteristics of corporate identities (whether they be multinational, traded on the market or not, etc.) have an impact on responsible actions (p. 148).

In the case of Swedish companies, Townsley and Stohl (2003) argue that corporate responsibility is framed by the nation’s traditional emphasis on labor welfare and its reputation as a feminist welfare state, the clout of its unions, its alignment with European Union norms and its participation in international trade. Comparing CSR reporting norms in Australia and Slovenia, Golob and Bartlett (2007) observe that the erstwhile-Yugoslavia’s traditionally liberal and worker-friendly social agenda is partly responsible for the worker- and community-oriented concerns of Slovenian CSR reporting, whereas Australian CSR reports focus more on the quality of products, management and financial performance. Similarly, Whelan (2007) notes the prominence of Confucian ethics among Chinese and East Asian business networks, which plays a part in the corporations’ crafting of corporate responsibility norms. Another study on Singapore-based firms argues that the city-state’s founding “communitarian” philosophies, with an equal emphasis on individual autonomy and social cohesion, are present in the CSR policies of these firms (Siramesh, Ng, Ting, & Wanyin, 2007). Thus, while Singapore corporations give a great deal of stress on the stakeholder approach in issues related to corporate responsibility, they also see a “strong role for the government as driver of CSR… primarily because of the unique socio-political environment of the city-state” (p. 128).
In the remaining portion of this chapter, I briefly go over the Indian economic context, which sheds some light on the organizational culture among Indian firms, and then explore the implications for corporate responsibility ethics in-vogue.

The Indian Firm

India’s progress in the global theatre – both political and economic – has been widely documented (see Chittoor & Ray, 2007; Das et al, 2005; Kaushik, 1997; Kedia et al., 2006; Khandwalla, 2002; Thornton, 1992). Most scholars have analyzed the “India Experience” in terms of a post-independence/pre-reforms period and a post-reforms period that marked the country’s meteoric ascent in global capital. Following India’s independence in 1947, the economic policy adopted by the central government was largely planned, emphasized a strong role for the government and focused on economic self-sufficiency (see Kedia et al., 2006). Termed the “two-sector model”, it was crafted by India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and is considered a compromise between the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and the imperatives of rapid economic growth (see Hardiman, 2003; Kaushik, 1997; Nanda, 1971). While Gandhian ideals stressed on growth in the small-scale traditional sector, focus on agriculture, economic self-sufficiency and environmental/ecological protection (Bose, 1971; Hardiman, 2003; Kumarappa, 1951), Nehru’s government favored rapid economic progress via heavy industrialization and investment in education, science and technology (Kaushik, 1997; Kedia et al., 2006; Nanda, 1971). In both his economic policy and foreign policy (nominal non-alignment with either side during the Cold War), Nehru strived for primacy in the South Asian region and in the postcolonial world context, and reflected the urgent need for newly-independent Indians to rapidly modernize and grow in stature (Levi, 1971).

The post-independence planned economy included some measures to foster growth in the agricultural and small-scale sectors, but the focus was clearly on large-scale industrial growth (Kaushik, 1997, Nanda, 1971). The government’s role in regulating the economy was emphasized, strict regulating and licensing norms were institutionalized, several key sectors were nationalized, and a policy of import substitution via a tariff/quota regime was established that encouraged the development of indigenous technology (Kaushik, 1997). With the ongoing Cold War and US support for India’s neighbor/rival
Pakistan, a foreign policy that was generally suspicious of global capital came into force (Thornton, 1992), so that foreign capital was strictly regulated and few transnational corporations operated in India. Financial markets were underdeveloped, financial intermediaries were absent and a strict labor policy beleaguered firing/hiring for Indian firms. Institutional ties were deemed crucial and the imperfect capital, labor and product markets resulted in large-scale product diversification and the emergence of business groups, rather than stand-alone companies (Kedia et al., 2006).

Despite the existence of trade guilds and other alternative forms of corporations in the pre-colonial era, modern-day Indian firms are organizationally structured along the colonial British model, and have adapted to global norms since then (Kakar, 1971). Several stalwarts of corporate India were on good terms with both Gandhi and Nehru, and actively supported the independence movement – and thereafter the postcolonial nation-building exercise – so that many of them have come to be hued with a nationalist tinge (see Lala, 2007; Roy, 2005; Rudolph, 1971). The planned economic model was driven by government allocation rather than market forces and made it crucial for Indian business groups (like the Tata Group) to hone their institutional relatedness – social, political and reputational – rather than product relatedness (Kedia et al., 2006). However, despite perceptions of a nurturing/parochial management style reminiscent of the so-called submissive and collectivist East (Cushman & Kincaid, 1987; Dissanayake, 1987; Mehrotra, 1982), empirical study revealed that this could not be taken for granted. For instance, examining authority patterns in Indian organizations, Kakar (1971) concluded that rather than “concepts of national character and modal personality, with their implications of cultural relativism,… a consideration of the ideals of the communities, essentially occupational, both inside and outside the organization, from which most members derive their sense of identity” (p. 305) is essential. This echoes the “institutional” approach (rather than national culture-driven) to organizational strategy more recently theorized by Singh (2007).

Inevitably, the policy of regulation and import substitution resulted in several industries and corporations lacking competitiveness, an opaque licensing regime and a severe shortage of foreign exchange. Several factors led up to the deregulation and liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 (see
Das et al, 2005; Kaushik, 1997; Kedia et al., 2006; Khandwalla, 2002; Thornton, 1992). With the collapse of the Soviet Union and significant in-roads in Indo-US diplomacy following the Reagan era, there wasn’t as much aversion to globalization and global capital. The so-called urban middle class had swelled its ranks and attracted foreign capital. Most importantly, there was a severe balance-of-payments crisis, and India had to repay its loans to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The resulting policy of liberalization and deregulation saw a significant reduction in import tariffs/quotas, reduction of restrictions on foreign ownership, currency convertibility on the trade account, abolition of the licensing regime and red-tape, privatization of several industrial sectors, and a reduction in excise duties. Regarded as the “competitive shock of the 1990s” (Kedia et al., 2006), the move forced Indian firms to re-structure and re-align their operations. For instance, business groups now saw greater value in product relatedness rather than institutional relatedness, and strived to either consolidate along core competences or embark on “aggressive diversification” (Khandwalla, 2002) to build on existing strength. The shake-down of the ’90s saw an unprecedented level of organizational differentiation, newer forms of effective management, decision-making structures and global ventures, through a contingency model of liberalization (Som, 2002). Management ideology and CEO personalities were central to this revamping, and Khandwalla (2002) notes,

The new rhetoric of corporate India seems to be “change is the only constant”, “only quality ensures survival”, “people, not products, are paramount”, and “information is everything”; and the main challenges before their chief executives are seen to be to create flexible systems, to develop a culture of excellence, to facilitate teamwork and empower employees, and to speed up and decentralize data flows. (pp. 428-429)

It is interesting to note the similarity between this language and the rhetoric of ‘new’ capitalism, discussed in Chapter 2, highlighting the importance of global flows.

In fact, globalization – both the drawbacks and opportunities it represented – was a crucial driver in the re-structuring of Indian firms post 1991. The competition from newly entering multinational corporations (or re-entering in the case of certain MNCs like Coca Cola) caused several Indian firms to
trim or re-align their business interests. Many Indian firms also embarked on mergers and acquisitions, both domestic and international, and ventured in new markets. In particular, Indian firms in the software and pharma sectors got a fillip, tapping developed markets in Europe and North America. Chittoor and Ray’s (2007) study looked at the different internationalization paths taken by 40 Indian pharma MNCs, and their analysis reveals a wide mix of exploratory and ownership advantage exploiting moves. While the issue of Western MNCs outsourcing their back-office operations to cheaper, more focused service firms in India has drawn widespread attention, the Indian service and knowledge sector is undergoing a further upgrade and re-structuring of operations, while Indian firms from manufacturing and energy sectors have also made recent global strides (for instance, see Murthy, 2008). In Forbes’ annual round-up of the world’s topmost earning CEOs (Hau, 2008), there were four Indians in the top 10 – unheard of, for any other developing country in the world.

The aggressive economic outlook sketched out so far is in marked contrast to the traditional notion of Indian business and personal culture as easy-going, polite, submissive and inward-looking (Cushman & Kincaid, 1987; Dissanayake, 1987; Mehrotra, 1982; Thornton, 1992), providing further anecdotal evidence to the simultaneous convergence/divergence of global flows, cultural identity, social relationships and individual ethics (Lin & Clair, 2007; Nelson & Gopalan, 2003; Stohl, 2001, 2003; Townsley & Stohl, 2003). Following Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination in 1948, Gandhian rhetoric and methods were elevated to demigod status in postcolonial India, but arguably diluted by government policy both at the central and state levels (Hardiman, 2003). Thus, while Indian corporate responsibility in the postcolonial age is often posited to have Gandhian roots, it is important to contextualize the CSR discourse in light of the dialectical flows of Gandhian ethics, Nehruvian policy, and post-reform global flows.

Ethics of Corporate Responsibility in India

Corporate responsibility is seen to be understood and exercised in India according to four main models, and I first discuss the confluence of ethics in these models before noting the current situation and anticipated trends of CSR in the country. Drawing from the observations of both industry and academy, I
then elaborate on three main areas, namely, the systemic drawbacks to a purely voluntary ‘business case’ of CSR (see Chapter 2); a perceived need for “mainstreaming” (Glover, 2007) of corporate responsibility with the firms’ normal business operations; and the attendant motive of nation-building seen through corporate responsibility efforts.

Confluence of Ethics

Several scholars have posited that Indian firms have a long-abiding tradition of corporate social responsibility (see Arora & Puranik, 2004; Gupta & Saxena, 2006; Mitra, 2007). Broadly speaking, four main brands of corporate responsibility are seen to be in practice among Indian companies presently, none of them mutually exclusive (Kumar et al., 2001). These are: the neo-liberal model or ‘business case’ of corporate responsibility; the stakeholder model derived from Freeman’s (1984) primacy to the various stakeholders (internal and external) of a corporation; the ethical philanthropic model inspired by Gandhian teachings; and the statist model backed by government-led social reforms and put into place by Nehruvian economic policy. In Chapter 2, I dealt with the neoliberal ‘business case’ and stakeholder models in-depth.

In the preceding section of this chapter, I broached the differences between Nehruvian policy that set the stage for much of India’s present (and arguably, future) and Gandhian ethics that are largely seen as moral “directive principles”. The ethical-philanthropic and statist models thus have both similarities and dissimilarities. More ancient precursors to organizational ethics in India are evident in the guiding religious principles of the people. For instance, Gupta and Saxena (2006), in their analysis of CSR in the aviation sector, note the importance of *loksamagraha*, a concept from the Hindu text the *Bhagvad Gita*, which they translate as “binding men together, and protecting, maintaining and regulating them in such a way that they might acquire that strength, which results from mutual cooperation, thereby putting them on the path of acquiring merit while maintaining their good conditions” (p. 4). Another study recognizes the important role played by concepts of *dharma* (ethical life principles) and *karma* (principles of life’s work) in the Hindu system that “still holds sway over majority of Indian minds” (Mehta et al., 2006, p. 55), together with Islamic practices of *zakath* (compulsory alms) and *khairaat* (volunteer charity). With the
colonization of the Indian subcontinent, Christian values of charity were also incorporated into this ethical framework (Mehta et al., 2006). Thus, there is a large stream of ethics in the Indian context that emphasizes “a ‘giving’ culture” (p. 74).

Though Indian corporations ascribe the ethical-philanthropic model to Gandhian ethics (Kumar et al., 2001), a close reading of Gandhian works reveals that the Mahatma rejected charity as effective corporate responsibility (Richards, 1991). Rather than charity, the Gandhian concepts of trusteeship and sarvodaya were deemed to be more effective means of corporate responsibility. Hardiman (2003) quotes Gandhi on the essence of trusteeship,

We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on who he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be used destructively or creatively. (p. 83)

Thus, while the idea of trusteeship has been held by some quarters to be too idealistic at best and unrealistic at worst, it is clear that power disparity issues were kept in mind by Gandhian ethics. Related to trusteeship is the idea of sarvodaya, translated to mean “the welfare of all” (Bose, 1971, p. 79), which is linked to the self-sufficiency (swadeshi, or home-grown) of the nation and its smallest unit, the village. While modern Euro-centric science and technology were not regarded very favorably by Gandhi in his early treatises, he later modified his stance to argue for “a curb on our material desires and refusing to fetishise technology” (Hardiman, 2003, p. 69). Instead, Gandhian thought has stressed on “economic theory that is oriented towards people” (Richards, 1991, p. 131), and what E. F. Schumacher (1973) referred to in his ground-breaking book Small Is Beautiful as “intermediate technology” – rather than mass production, production by the masses, which is attuned to the contextual needs of a people.

Given the close relations between Gandhian ethics and Nehruvian policy detailed in the earlier section of this chapter, it was inevitable that several of these strands found their way into official government policy, post 1947. The statist model of corporate responsibility is guided by the Indian Constitution’s “directive principles” related to labor laws and management doctrines (Kumar et al., 2001), and has been further influenced by the two-sector planned economic model followed (Arora & Puranik,
2004). This model is particularly relevant in the case of the large public sector companies that have survived post-reforms, and for them “social obligations remain an integral part of their business despite the march of privatization” (Kumar, 2004, p. 1).

Global-local dynamics have also played a part in molding corporate responsibility edicts for Indian firms, be they homegrown or daughter companies of foreign MNCs, as have histories in terms of the pre-reforms or post-reforms period, organizational structure of a stand-alone company or a business group, and concerns of ecocentric management and crisis prevention (see CREM, 2004; Glover, 2007; Ice, 1991; Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; Raman, 2007; Shrivastava, 1995; SHRM, 2007). A study examining the perceptions of corporate responsibility by an urban public notes that though “the strength of Indian traditions and classical literature provides an underlying ethos that reinforces CSR... modern business practices are likely to erode this” (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005, p. 83). Thus, while considering the findings of research on current situations and future trends of corporate responsibility in India, it is imperative to keep in mind this great confluence of ethics.

**Current Situation and Future Trends**

India does not have any legal regulations/ requirements on corporate responsibility in place currently, other than the mandatory pollution and safety standards – many of which lag considerably behind the legal mandates in the West (see Bhushan, 2005). While some policy guidelines for private corporation involvement in the health sector have been formulated, a regulatory framework on education – by far, one of the key corporate responsibility areas – is lacking (NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). Thus, corporate responsibility in India is voluntary in nature. At the end of 2003, over 66,000 ISO 14 001 environmental management standards had been granted to Indian corporations by the International Organization of Standardization, a jump of 16% from the year above, and more than 95 Indian companies are currently signatories to the UN Global Compact (see www.unglobalcompact.com). Several recent surveys indicate rising expectations of corporate responsibility from Indian corporations by the general
public, and the inclination to hold them responsible for factors directly under their control, such as product quality, environmental pollution and workplace policy (Kumar et al., 2001).

The infamous Bhopal gas leak of 1984, which killed thousands and disabled many more, and the crisis response by perpetrating company Union Carbide have been analyzed by scholars as a decisive moment for Indian CSR – and the vulnerabilities it presents (Hollihan & Riley, 1989; Ice, 1991; Stohl et al., 2007). Carbide’s rhetorical strategy focused on denial and differentiating itself from its local subsidiary, thereby blaming the Indian government for its inefficiency and rejecting claims by the citizens of Bhopal who were affected in the tragedy (Ice, 1991). Accordingly,

Carbide’s response to what should be done following the gas leak dealt with the scientific, rather than the human, sides of the leak’s effects… One might even wonder whom Carbide saw as the victim – Carbide or the Bhopal residents?... Its financial justifications were designed to bolster stockholders’ perceptions of the corporation, focusing on the financial future of the company. (pp. 357-358)

From a purely public relations point of view (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), perhaps the strategy to focus on its investors and client base rather than address the common man made sense for a company like Union Carbide, which does not supply products directly to the public but to other industrial companies. However, this strategy clearly goes against the principles of social responsibility and accountability.

Research on current corporate responsibility practices in India has ranged from the general (across sectors and companies) to the particular (only for MNCs, or for particular sectors). Indian corporations use a variety of vehicles for their CSR initiatives, be it direct action by the company or through a foundation established solely for that purpose or through tie-ups with government agencies or non-governmental organizations (Kumar, 2004; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; SHRM, 2007). The findings on the drivers of corporate responsibility however are mixed: while some surveys show that the ‘business case’ of greater brand creation and commercial benefits from CSR measures is the motivation (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; British Council et al., 2002; Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; PIC, 2003; SHRM, 2007), they (and many others) also show that social
responsiveness or the need to help build the developing nation’s economy are paramount (British Council et al., 2002; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; PIC, 2003; SHRM, 2007). Interestingly, a high proportion of corporations (across surveys) said that the founders’ guiding principles paved the way for their initiatives, supporting the trusteeship model and personality-driven corporate responsibility (British Council et al., 2002; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). Areas of CSR initiatives were across various sectors, but education/vocational training was the most popular choice by far, followed by community development and livelihood generation (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; British Council et al., 2002; CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). Older and larger companies were perceived to be more socially responsible than newer ones, though in the case of new-age sectors like information technology and pharma the post-reforms new companies were seen to be highly responsible (Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007).

Responsibility had several meanings, however: a disproportionate amount of corporations seemed to regard corporate philanthropy as corporate responsibility (even though some were loath to call it so and used terms like ‘community development’ rather than philanthropy, in the case of sponsoring/building a hospital); but, the general public at large were clear that philanthropy was just one part of CSR and much more was needed (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; SHRM, 2007). At the same time, stakeholders (like potential customers) were reluctant to censure (for instance, through boycotting products) corporations deemed socially irresponsible if price considerations were still favorable (Kumar et al., 2001) – thus, showing the limitations of the conscientious consumer model (see O’Connor et al., 2008) that is so prevalent in the West. Though most corporations avowed corporate responsibility principles, only a minority actually had a concrete policy in place and for most only an ad hoc operation was in progress (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; British Council et al., 2002; CREM, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). This may be partly explained because of the inherent separation of divisions in charge of corporate responsibility measures and the normal business operations of the
company, which was another overwhelming find in most studies. As a result, there is a severe lack of evaluation of CSR measures, both in terms of inclination (CSR divisions are routinely allowed to miss their targets) and methods (companies are unsure of how to measure returns on their initiatives). Also, this means that most CSR initiatives are not conducted where they are perhaps needed the most, but in locales/areas around the corporate offices or plants – which perhaps explains the South and West concentration of most CSR measures, since a disproportionate number of Indian corporations have their headquarters in these regions of the country (Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). This concentration may also explain why of all the cities surveyed, people in the Southern and Western cities of Chennai and Mumbai were the most demanding of corporate responsibility norms, compared to Kolkata and New Delhi in the East and North of the country (Kumar et al., 2001). Moreover, the surveys revealed that rather than either the corporations themselves or the government, people trusted independent agencies like the media or non-profit non-governmental organizations to best have society’s interests in mind (Kumar et al., 2001; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). This has important implications for the issue of institutional linkages between Organization-State-Media that become so vital for organizational colonization (Deetz, 1992).

Sector-specific studies of corporate responsibility also assume importance here. For instance, Gupta and Saxena’s (2006) study of CSR perceptions in the aviation sector show a marked lack of general public knowledge about corporate responsibility initiatives of the airlines, though company executives were very proud of these measures. Moreover, their findings corroborated the results of general economy CSR norms, in that the public was not too hasty to censure ‘irresponsible’ corporations if the price and service record was favorable.

The software and information technology sector is regarded as a frontrunner in setting corporate responsibility standards in India (Kumar et al., 2001). The founder of one of India’s largest and best-known IT companies, Infosys, opines that

…decision makers across Indian companies today recognize that following the dictates of a broader, social conscience can help them realize new markets, increased profits, an improved
corporate image, and happier employees… [It] enables them to contribute meaningfully to economic and social development in the country. (Murthy, 2007, p. x).

At the same time, what he deems CSR – “corporate governance, sustainable wealth creation, corporate philanthropy” (p. ix) – is seen to be in line both with the limited corporate philanthropy model and the neoliberal model that focuses on face-saving/ enhancing exercises. The premier body for IT firms in India, NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Companies, see www.nasscom.in), reported that 85% of its member companies have active CSR programs in areas as diverse as education, rural development, co-operatives, health programs, mobile clinics, etc., either independently or in partnership (NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). However, most IT firms also side with the economy-wide norms, in terms of a focus on philanthropy, lack of rigorous evaluation models, CSR initiatives apart from normal business operations, and CSR as largely personality-driven rather than policy-driven (NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). Moreover, a study conducted by Chaudhri and Wang (2007) on the use of corporate websites by Indian IT companies to highlight their CSR initiatives found that only 30% have CSR information on their sites. Even the ones that do, have not made sufficient use of the interactive medium to produce effective CSR information, and perhaps most importantly, “with the exception of a few companies, stakeholders are seldom mentioned… Quantification of CSR achievements and mention of monetary investment in specific initiatives leads one to speculate that a large part of the information is intended to justify investment to investors” (p. 243). Thus what emerges are highly confused, mixed signals, on the importance of CSR and the goal of social change, from the supposedly progressive Indian IT sector.

While it would be presumed that multinational corporations based in the West (but operating in India) would have more concrete corporate responsibility policies in place, the actual situation is quite haphazard. In many cases, the parent MNC leaves CSR policy to be determined by the daughter MNC, which takes the lack of regulatory framework in India to mean a lax environment to operate in, so that, oftentimes, pollution and quality standards are much lower in India than the parent MNC would be allowed to get away with in the West (Bhushan, 2005; CREM, 2004; Raman, 2007). Though many parent
MNCs insist their daughter corporations get involved with CSR work (Mehta et al., 2006), inadequate communication between them, combined with a lack of policy on supply chain management, increases the chances of ‘irresponsible’ operations by daughter MNCs (CREM, 2004). They are also perceived as less trustworthy by the general public (Kumar et al., 2001). MNCs operating in India tend to see human rights and social development as out of their purview of operations, and for them business operations are to be regarded as strictly apolitical, despite institutional linkages with the State and possible human right violations. While customer-stakeholders expect long-term commitment/assistance in social change projects (education, livelihood generation) from MNCs, the companies themselves consider this unnecessary for business operations (CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001). Thus, the literature suggests an intercultural roadblock between MNCs and their stakeholder publics (customers or surrounding impacted communities) in terms of long term nation-building.

This snapshot of the present also suggests some directions for the future of corporate responsibility in India. For instance, “most respondents recognize that there is a paradigm shift occurring wherein investors of the future shall demand greater transparency in disclosure of both financial and non-financial information to better understand companies” (Mehta et al., 2006, pp. 90-91). Accordingly, findings indicate that newer companies are embracing corporate responsibility measures much earlier in their business cycle, than their older compatriots did (British Council et al., 2002; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). In anticipation of this “paradigm shift” several companies are reportedly re-structuring their CSR divisions and formulating a more coherent policy, though there is little indication that they are attempting to “mainstream” their corporate responsibility in line with their normal business operations. Moreover, while there are rising expectations from the general public (British Council et al., 2002; CREM, 2004; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; SHRM, 2007), this is not likely to translate shortly into widespread consumer-accountability or ethical investing, as observed in some Western countries (Kumar et al., 2001). Though philanthropic initiatives dominate the CSR scene (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; SHRM, 2007), several companies are taking the next step of project
assistance/ implementation/ sustenance with State agencies and NGOs, to meet larger developmental goals (British Council et al., 2002; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). A potential tension may be brewing between urban demands and rural needs for development: while health and education still remain the most important areas for CSR to focus on, a large majority of urban respondents want CSR to address transport, infrastructure building and workplace issues (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005). While CEO-driven CSR agendas may be replaced by company ethos-based agendas, employee activism is likely to remain a strong driver for corporate responsibility efforts on a local stage (Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; SHRM, 2007). Trust in the media and NGOs does not seem completely misplaced either, given that the NGO-partnership mechanism was the most popular CSR channel observed (and slated to continue), and even the media has been focusing on issues of organizational ethics across sectors (Bhan, 2008; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). The State’s role in furthering corporate responsibility, however, looks suspect in the absence of any clear regulatory framework (see Bhushan, 2005). While corporations are avowedly eager for State directives in this area, especially in education, healthcare and livelihood generation (British Council et al., 2002; CREM, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007), there have been little concrete steps in this direction.

Failure of the ‘Business Case’

The lack of effective State regulation on CSR has prompted several scholars and practitioners to suggest that the neoliberal ‘business case’ of voluntary corporate responsibility has failed – and is doomed to further failure – in India. MNCs are observed to operate under less stringent quality and pollution guidelines than they would in their parent countries, there are several instances where mandatory laws are ignored, and the State-established Special Economic Zones (SEZs) allow companies to legally circumvent existing mandatory standards as well (Bhushan, 2005; CREM, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Garvey & Newell, 2005; Newell, 2005). Notably, Bhushan (2005) opines that even when ignored, mandatory standards and laws serve as irreplaceable “tools available to citizens to redress grievances” (p. 3) and thus their very presence is important. Studies have also noted the fundamental inside-outside
dichotomy posed by voluntary CSR measures, where the organization, its immediate surroundings and its employees are considered ‘inside’ and thus more important stakeholders, whereas everyone else (including far-flung communities who may be impacted by the company’s actions) are Othered as ‘outside’ (British Council et al., 2002; CREM, 2004; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; SHRM, 2007).

Further support for the accountability case is provided by situations where so-called stalwarts of Indian industry have reneged on their corporate social responsibility pledges. Garvey and Newell (2005) trace how the consumer products giant Unilever India, following a mercury leak in 2001, simply closed down its Kodaikanal operations in the state of Kerala and transferred them to another Indian state. The company had also refused to give ex-workers access to their medical records and opposed an independent health or environmental survey. Even homegrown Indian corporations have acted irresponsibly at times, as in the case of publicly owned power giant National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), which violated safety standards at its Vishakhapatnam facility, despite being a signatory to the UN Global Compact (Newell, 2005). Often, as in these cases, the high stature of the company, or the jobs afforded by it in the region, or its isolated philanthropic activities building much-needed schools, hospitals, etc in the region, allow offending companies to get away with a flagrant violation of both government statutes and their own lofty codes of social responsibility.

Moreover, companies are usually unwilling to muddy their hands in human rights or other political issues (see CREM, 2004; British Council et al., 2002), which are rarely divorced from social change and development. Survey findings show that several corporations are hesitant to craft a formal corporate responsibility policy, because they dread justifying it to investors and also providing a fillip to already inflated customer and community expectations (British Council et al., 2002). Also, despite the rhetoric of corporate responsibility, Bhushan (2005) notes the lack of clarity on what kind of development companies seek to bring about.
‘Development’ is a very broad term and has many facets… With such a broad landscape, it is plainly clear that there are only limited facets of development where CSR can play a major role; in the rest, its role is truly limited. (p. 6)

Thus, this line of argument is similar to the fundamental differences critique against corporate responsibility, in Chapter 2. While companies increasingly petition the State for further tax, duties and custom benefits as part of a CSR-enabling package (British Council, 2002; Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007), recent controversies over the SEZ issue has made both the State and industry more cautious on such sops (for instance, see Chaudhary, 2008). Thus, Indian corporations might be pressured in the long term to embrace a more holistic view of corporate responsibility, embodied in their mainstream business operations (rather than one-off public relations and philanthropic gestures) and long-term nation-building commitments (rather than short-term capitalist projects).

Mainstreaming Corporate Responsibility

It would be inappropriate to aver that research has utterly ignored instances where corporate responsibility has been wedded to the mainstream operations of Indian corporations. As Kumar et al. (2001) argue, “to be successful, corporate responsibility must become an integral part of business strategy” (p. 19). However, research has shown that such instances have not been altogether successful. I will focus on two such examples here.

Raman (2007) examines the case against Coca Cola on charges of willful pollution and depletion of groundwater, brought forward against the company by impacted communities living around its plants. Coca Cola failed to conduct an exhaustive environmental impact assessment, undermined the severe water shortage that was facing the villages around its factories in three states, and distributed its toxic sludge to neighboring farmers as fertilizers. Moreover, independent studies revealed that its product had exceedingly high concentrations of pesticides. While the company earlier withdrew its products from the British market under similar charges, it opted for complete denial in India. In his analysis of the corporate rhetoric in Coca Cola’s responses to the various charges leveled against it, Raman (2007) uses Habermas’
(1984, 1987) theory of communicative action to conclude that “despite a professed commitment to democracy and transparency, CSR as a lived experience leaves much to be realized… the ‘public sphere’ thus remains shrouded in a veil of corporate deceit and duplicity” (p. 114). In this situation, the ethics of corporate responsibility are clearly not meant to be divorced from the everyday business operations of the organization, yet they seem unable to impact the business case of profit-making – resulting in a “crisis of legitimation” (p. 105), that underscores the argument of the failure of the neoliberal CSR ethic.

During the 1960s and 1970s, several Western agro-business MNCs increased their operations in India and incorporated schemes to transfer technology to small-sector farmers (Mehta et al., 2007). Monsanto’s Smallholder Programme (SHP) was implemented much later, between 1999 and 2002, but may be regarded as a natural extension of such measures. The SHP was intended to provide a package of agricultural extension support to ‘smallholders’ in select developing countries (including India), and Glover (2007) examines the reasons for its untimely demise. Glover (2007) considers the SHP as an attempt to “mainstream” CSR, in that there was a strong link on the logistical and supply side between the company’s SHP division and its mainstream marketing department. SHP was devised to identify holdings and farmers who were underdeveloped, but who had potential for growth, and supply them with technical know-how and advice – with the long-term hopes of cultivating them as customers for Monsanto. By all accounts, the program was highly successful in its ‘seeding’ strategy, but was withdrawn after Monsanto’s headquarters went through a financial rough patch. Glover (2007) recounts that the very mainstream ties that had paved the way for SHP’s initial success also caused it to die out: in terms of demanding that SHP show stronger returns to the bottom-line, and treating it more as an experimental marketing initiative rather than a crucial corporate responsibility edict. Importantly, unequal stakeholder relationships prevented SHP from reaching its potential, as it was representative of “a corporate code of conduct that primarily address[ed] the anxiety of concerned publics in the North, rather than stakeholders in the South” (p. 863), so that “the firm’s accountability to its shareholders and creditors trumped the competing claims of other stakeholders, including those of the supposed ‘beneficiaries’ of the smallholder projects” (p. 865). In this case study, the very proximity of corporate responsibility ethics to mainstream
business operations jeopardizes the viability of CSR. However, while Glover (2007) concludes that the two “cannot be neatly or simply reconciled” (p. 865) with each other, he holds out hope of a paradigm shift in this direction.

*Nation-Building and Corporate Responsibility*

Post-reforms, there has been a palpable surge in national confidence that has both benefited and been benefited by the burgeoning fortunes of corporate India. This link with the idea of nation-building and cultural identity is also apparent in the norms of corporate responsibility in India. While motives of ‘social responsiveness’ or ‘community uplift’ are commonly found in the CSR agendas of corporations across the world (see Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; SHRM, 2007; Sriramesh et al., 2007; Townsley & Stohl, 2003), these must be problematized in light of the global aspirations of emerging economies like India. Research findings indicate not only that Indian corporations inculcate the rhetoric of nation-building in their CSR agendas, but also that the general public’s expectations of corporate responsibility are very much along the lines of nation-building. Surveys consistently show companies ascribing social change and community development motives to their CSR agenda (Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; PIC, 2003; SHRM, 2007), while the general public in turn expects companies to step up their role in furthering social transformation (British Council, 2002; CREM, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006).

In particular, areas such as education, healthcare, community development and livelihood generation are seen to dominate CSR discourse in India (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; CREM, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007; PIC, 2003). The importance of these areas for both the Gandhian ethical-philanthropic model and the Nehruvian statist model are easily apparent. For Gandhi, primary education, vocational training “and the need for it to be economically self-sufficient” were to be “the spearhead of a silent social revolution fraught with a sound economic basis” (Richards, 1991, p. 112). Community development, via education and the generation of employment, was essential in the Gandhian scheme of things (Hardiman, 2003). Accordingly, the statist model pursued by Nehru also promoted higher education aggressively, entered into partnerships with the large business
houses of the day for vocational training measures, strengthened local self-government bodies at the village level, and guaranteed primary education for all. The fact that more than 50% of the IT industry’s CSR budget is dominated by educational initiatives thus cannot be considered lightly (NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). Educational interventions are also varied, ranging from the simpler philanthropic and capacity-based interventions, to utilizing information and computer technology directly, to the more complex mechanism of providing program implementation support and actual policy formulation. More explicitly, 86% of IT companies felt that their educational initiatives “contributed to a wider national goal” (p. 17).

Organizations aver that there is a need to be “seen as having roots in the community” (Mehta, et al., 2006, p. 67), and demonstrate long-term commitment to social development. Another study reveals that “majority [companies] expressed the view that nation building through uplift of the underprivileged, and ethical conduct including compliance of business, welfare of its primary stakeholders” was the definition “closest to their perceptions of CSR” (PIC, 2003). The attendant discourse of nation-building also explains why MNCs consistently fare badly, compared to homegrown Indian corporations, in terms of corporate responsibility perceptions. Kumar et al. (2001) find “very few mentions of major multinational corporations [in their survey] and it would seem that those that were mentioned were simply quoted because they are the most visible” (p. 14). While MNCs were rated responsible on the grounds of perception management and brand value, Indian corporations were usually judged on criteria like ethical behavior, environmental care and community development – and the Tata Group was overwhelmingly named the most socially responsible on these parameters. Mehta et al. (2006) cite the representative of a foreign automobile MNC operating in India, as describing “the role in terms of proving Indianness and commitment to the community and country” (p. 71). A report on Dutch MNCs operating in India finds a cultural mismatch on the Indian expectations of long-term commitment at the macro-level and community development projects at the micro-level, because the Dutch frame of CSR considers the former as “beyond international obligations” and the latter as “charity and not CSR” (CREM, 2004, p. 88).
The literature reviewed so far suggests then that the theme of nation-building is wedded to the corporate responsibility discourse in India, tempered and shaped by (as it in turn tempers and shapes) a confluence of ethics, both domestic and global (Gandhian, Nehruvian, neo-liberal, post-reforms statist, stakeholder, etc.). The issue of whether such a doctrine is manufactured or inherent is not as vital as understanding the organization/stakeholder co-creation of such an ethic. For instance, the neoliberal concept of corporate citizen (discussed under the ‘business case’ of corporate responsibility in Chapter 2) would seem to emphasize the idea of nation-building, if through no other relation than the word ‘citizen’. Using corporate responsibility theory to understand the organizational colonization of the life-world, it thus becomes unclear as to who/what colonizes: does the CSR discourse colonize the nation-building ethic, or does the nation-building ethic colonize the organizational discourse on corporate responsibility?

A close reading of not just the organizational discourse, but the institutional linkages supporting it, social contexts/practices couching it, and discursive practices expressing it, are thus necessary to explore this issue.

Before detailing my methodological stance and the method of analysis employed in Chapter 4, it would be worthwhile to once again go over the guiding questions behind this study. Thus,

- How is the Organization (Tata Motors) crafted as a social agent, in the case study at hand?
- How is the Organization-State relationship framed in the case study, and what implications does this have for the nation-building ethic of corporate development and social responsibility?
- How does the Organization (Tata Motors) address or engage with dissidents to the Nano project, especially the rural farmers protesting the land acquisition for the car factory?
- How is the Organizational Project (the Nano launch) framed between the Organization-authored text (media releases) and the Media coverage?
In particular, through these questions, I examine the role of nation-building as an underlying stream in the corporate responsibility discourse, and the legitimacy/legitimizing of stakeholders by the Organization-State-Media linkage.
The ethic of dialectic examined in Chapters 2 and 3 will be further fleshed out in this chapter, as I piece together the method (rather, process) of research this study has been guided by. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) say that the researcher’s ontological (how one sees the world to be studied), epistemological (how one sees the role of knowledge in the study) and methodological (the methods one employs accordingly) bent may be termed a paradigm, that “makes particular demands on the researcher, including the questions he or she asks and the interpretations the researcher brings to them” (p. 19). To this list, Burrell and Morgan (1979) add yet another component: how does the researcher view the relationship between human nature and the environment; is agency prioritized (voluntarism), or is structure and pre-determined ‘destiny’ in command (determinism)? Accordingly, it becomes necessary to clarify my position – and that of my research – on these grounds before I justify the use of qualitative methods in this study.

The dialectic approach I adhere to falls in the realm of nominal ontology that Burrell and Morgan (1979) allude to; however, while a person’s social world is shaped by his/ her social interactions and cognition, the place of the ‘real’ or extra-discursive world may not be completely discounted. In terms of epistemology, my bent of research agrees with the anti-positivist stream, whereby “one can only ‘understand’ by occupying the frame of reference of the participant in action… from the inside rather than the outside” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 5). In the majority of cases, such an epistemological stand brings with it the use of ideographic methods that emphasize the analysis of subjective accounts generated from the ‘inside’, and it is no different in my situation. On the voluntarism-versus-determinism debate on human nature, the dialectical approach I employ sees an inter-play of both structure and agency, and I will elaborate more on this soon enough. Based on the subjective-objective dimension and the theatre of order-versus-conflict, Burrell and Morgan (1979) further define four paradigms of research: namely, functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist. The debate of order-versus-conflict may be simplified as: does the researcher, through his/ her research, strive to explain the current order of
the social world (this becomes then the sociology of regulation), or is there instead a drive to engage into conflict with the status quo to usher in perhaps a more ‘just’ and equitable situation (thus, the sociology of radical change)? The aim of this thesis is not merely to examine the dialectics involved (globalization, Gandhian flows, Nehruvian strategy, sustainable development, etc.) in the situation at hand, but to also examine the organized silencing (Clair, 1998) of alternative voices, which may suggest routes for voicing dissent against the dominant order. Accordingly, a sociology of radical change is implied, which places this research squarely in the camp of the ‘radical humanist’: it shares a “concern for the release of consciousness and experience from domination by various aspects of the ideological superstructure of the social world” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 33).

Such a research agenda and interpretive project gives clear priority to the lived experience of both researcher and researched, rather than the systematic discovery and internal/external validation of theories, reliability of observations, and objectively recording the ‘external’/’material’ world of positivism, so that qualitative methods become the natural choice (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Qualitative inquiry focuses on “critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). At the same time, new ideals of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are negotiated between researcher and researched (p. 21). Schwandt (2000) further highlights the need for qualitative inquiry to pay attention to the fidelity of phenomena, respect for the life world, attention to the fine-grained details of daily life, as well as the field workers’ own interests, motivations, obligations and texts.

In the next section, I will briefly talk about social constructionism, the methodological framework I have used to guide me in this study. While it is beyond my capacity (and that of this study) to provide an exhaustive litany of the various views held in/ on social constructionism, I hope to provide further insight into the relationships between discourse, power, ideology, agency and structure. Building on the work of prior scholars, I will then show how the extended case study may be considered a discursive event replete with its competing ideologies, so that discourse and discourse analysis may serve to alter and/or
appropriate the state quo, acting as a vehicle for social change. Organizational researchers have long employed discourse analysis in several projects, and I will briefly address some of the chief concerns regarding critical discourse analysis in the organizational context. I will close by introducing the sites and methods of analysis for this study, using a three-dimensional lens to examine discourse as social practice, as text and as discursive practice (Fairclough, 1992), each of which will be further examined in Chapter 5.

**Tenets of Social Constructionism**

Burr (1995) remarks that “there is no single description which would be adequate” (p. 2) for social constructionism – and perhaps that is fitting, given what the paradigm entails. Instead, both she and Allen (2005) describe what social constructionism is by (a) listing what it is not, in terms of how it disagrees with positivism, and (b) listing some of its more common features, all the while noting that several social constructionists do not agree on many of these so-called commonalities. In arguing for the primacy of the mind in sense-making of the surrounding environment, Schwandt (2000) says,

> In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. (p. 196)

Present understandings of social constructionism are influenced heavily by the work of Kenneth Gergen (1973), who argued that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific, and the socio-political situatedness of discourse and individuals assumes primary importance. Even earlier, Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) anti-essentialist account of social life envisioned three fundamental processes in sustaining social practices: the *externalization* of the world, when people act on it to create an artifact/practice; *objectivation*, when the created artifact/practice becomes a factual object of truth for people; and finally, its *internalization*, because future generations are born in a world where the ‘object’ has always existed and thus it becomes internalized as part of consciousness. These accounts clearly show how individuals ‘construct’ the world around them through social interaction, grappling with both the
discursive and extra-discursive/ material aspects of the world – though this latter point remains an issue of debate for many social constructionists.

Rather than detailing here all the points of debate/ conflict among social constructionists, I will explicate on the tenets my methodology here is based upon. First, knowledge is taken to be derived from social interactions and relations, and sustained by social processes (Gergen, 1973); thus it is the process or the dialectic that achieves primacy rather than any fixed outcome (Allen, 2005; Burr, 1995). Such a view then sees socio-historical factors as important in shaping social interactions and, thereby, knowledge.

Meaning is thus continually being shaped and re-shaped through social relations, and is no longer just an ‘object’ (Schwandt, 2000). While this is a fairly anti-essential, anti-real stance (in that we construct our own version of reality as a culture or society, so that there is no particular ‘essence’ within things/ people that makes them what/ who they are), I am also attuned to the presence of extra-discursive or material aspects of reality. Thus, while language is “a necessary pre-condition for thought as we know it” (Burr, 1995, p. 7), since it mediates social interaction and thus knowledge, language may not always be coupled with meaning or reality (see Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a, 2000b; Conrad, 2004). Going by Schwandt’s (2000) characterization of social constructionists as weak/ moderate or strong, I would fall into the former category:

A weak or moderate interpretation of the role that social factors play in what constitutes legitimate, warranted, or true interpretations may well reject definitions of such notions as knowledge, justification, objectivity, and evidence as developed within the representationalist-empiricist-foundationalist nexus. But the perspective will attempt to recast these notions in a different epistemological framework and thereby preserve some way of distinguishing better or worse interpretations. A strong or radical interpretation of the role that social factors play in what constitutes legitimate knowledge results in a more radically skeptical and even nihilistic stance.

(p. 198)

Here, the “representationalist-empiricist-foundationalist nexus” represents the positivist tradition. The main pitfall of such a ‘strong’ version, as identified by Schwandt (2000), Burr (1995), Fairclough (1992)
and many others, is that of relativism: if language is the only deciding factor in framing the social world, and there are no extra-discursive inputs, then how is one interpretation different from any other? This question becomes an issue (or not) depending on the research ideology (or not) of the researcher. For instance, for those from the postmodern tradition, such a fragmented result is perfectly in line with the paradigmatic perspective. Thus, even as Burr (1995) declares that all social constructionists are essentially critical in nature, attempting to expose the inequality of the status quo and usher in a more ‘just’ and power-neutral scenario, Schwandt (2000) qualifies this, acknowledging that there is little agreement on the social and scientific goals and purposes of the interpretive project. The presence of ideology, and the deconstruction of what it means and how it acts, is therefore central to understanding how discourse may (or may not) bring about more equitable social change (Allen, 2005; Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992). As it is, knowledge and social action always go hand in hand: “descriptions or constructions of the world therefore sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others” (Burr, 1995, p. 5).

Together with relativism, another critique of social constructionism is the ambiguous status of the individual. The question that arises is: within this space of social relations and language, is there room for agency of the individual, or does structure determine practice? For instance, Fairclough (1992) notes how Michel Foucault (1972, 1979, 1980) has been criticized for what has been interpreted to be an overtly fatalistic scheme of discourse, and Allen (2005) notes that several social constructionist versions fail to take into account the fluid identity streams of the individual, which are active in molding social reality on their own account, while Burr (1995) cites instances where social constructionism seems at odds with the notion of personhood. Thus, the agency-structure relationship needs to be unpacked further in detailing a social constructionist methodology.

Importantly, social constructionism also contains the idea of reflexivity, which Burr (1995) interprets to mean two forces: first, where the researcher’s account of a situation also then becomes part of the situation and must be discursively analyzed as such, and secondly, where social constructionism and its analyses are not exempt either from the critical stance they bring to bear on other theories (p. 161).
Reflexively adapting a methodology of social constructionism thus provides the best hope for resolving the issues related to power, ideology, agency-structure and social change.

Some Key Methodological Concepts

Thus far, I have used the term ‘discourse’ without offering an explanation as to what I mean by it. For this study, I refer to Burr’s (1995) working definition of discourse as “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (p. 48). Different fields – and sub-fields – of study may favor their own working definitions, and organizational communication scholars tweak this in their own way (see Grant et al., 2004). According to the social constructionist framework, discourse is constitutive in that it creates social reality; however, there is a variety of discourses, each representing social reality in its own way. For Fairclough and Wodak (1997), the relationship between discourse and social reality is “dialectical”, so that discourse is “constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.” (p. 258). While discourse is often taken to be a sort of text, in that it includes spoken and written/ drawn imaginaries, there is room for further interpretation here as to its nature – either as “life as text” (Burr, 1995, p. 51) or discourse as social practice and thus action beyond text (van Dijk, 1997). The constitutive limits of discourse are also debatable in this regard (see Broadfoot, Deetz, & Anderson, 2004; Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1997).

The method I follow in this study is adapted from Norman Fairclough’s version of critical discourse analysis (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough, 1992, 1998; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), though I also draw upon other modes of inquiry (most notably, Owen’s, 1984, theme analysis for the news coverage section), which he has labeled textually-oriented discourse analysis or a social theory of discourse. Here, I prefer the latter term, because, as I will show, my analysis takes note of the concerns of several scholars (see Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a, 200b; Broadfoot et al., 2004; Conrad, 2004; Grant et al., 2004; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Sillince, 2007) to consider issues beyond the text to several layers of discourse and practice. Fairclough himself argues that critical discourse analysis, while essentially examining the text, should not be constrained to micro-processes and instead needs to make the
connections for conceiving social reality. Thus, “any discursive event (i.e., any instant of discourse) is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). In their essay on critical discourse analysis, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) first explain their methodological stance on issues of power, ideology, hegemony, agency/structure and social change, before detailing their actual method. I will follow here largely the same route.

Constitutive Discourse

Michel Foucault’s work on discourse and power has played a big role in shaping critical discourse analysis. In his earlier ‘archaeological’ work, Foucault (1972) details the rules of formation of discourse, the possible objects, enunciative modalities and subjects, concepts and strategies of a particular discourse, so that he is more concerned with the analysis of statements, performances and uses of language (Fairclough, 1992). Foucault himself notes the metamorphosis of history to archaeology, “to the intrinsic description of the monument” (p. 7), so that the role of the text has changed:

…the document was always treated as the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace. Now, through a mutation that is not of very recent origin, but which has still not come to an end, history has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, not the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. (pp. 6-7)

In this situation, Foucault’s aim in discourse analysis is to “uncover the principles and consequences of an autochthonous transformation”, resist the categories of cultural totalities, and instead highlight discontinuities “to question teleologies and totalizations” (pp. 14-15). In valuing discontinuities and formulating rules of discursive formation, discourse then becomes “a practice that has its own forms of sequence and succession” (p. 169). Neither does explicating a rule of formation result in the
determination of an object, enunciation or concept, but instead it speaks to “the principle of their multiplicity and dispersion” (p. 173).

Foucault’s archaeological work lays the groundwork for discursive formations as constitutive of social reality, within the limits of institutional and societal orders of discourse, that is, the totality of discursive practices therein (Fairclough, 1992). Also, since the relations between various discursive formations constitute the rules of formations of a given discursive formation, the interconnectedness of discourse (interdiscursivity) is also highlighted. Interdiscursivity is also related to, but distinct from intertextuality, which is a concept borrowed from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, “the idea that any text is a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing in, and transforming other texts” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 262). Fairclough (1992) regards manifest intertextuality as the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of specific other texts, while interdiscursivity (also referred to as ‘constitutive intertextuality’) is the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of orders of discourse (p. 85). In this study, both an intertextual and interdiscursive perspective is important, since it highlights the continuity/discontinuity in the production, distribution, consumption and interpretation of texts (see Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

**Power**

Fairclough (1992) regards the shift in Foucault’s writings from ‘archaeology’ to ‘genealogy’ as “a decentering of discourse” (p. 49) and the primacy of power, while the French philosopher himself differentiates between the two as: “‘archaeology’ would be the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities, and ‘genealogy’ would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local subjectivites, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play” (Foucault, 1980, p. 85). Foucault’s genealogical studies, of which *Discipline and Punish* (1979) is the most well-known, examines the play of power, resistance, knowledge and discourse. Several dialectics are established, in that power and resistance are conceived of as two sides of the same coin, as are power/knowledge and power/discourse. Discourse itself is seen to be almost akin to knowledge, or at least representative of it. For Foucault (1980), “relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a
discourse” (p. 93). Thus, discourse and power are mutually constitutive, in that power requires discourse, and discourse in turn is power (Burr, 1995).

Importantly, power is not a top-down repressive force (or the ‘sovereign power’ commonly conceived of, as theorized by Hobbes, Locke and others), but rather as acting along multiple points of contact among/within society producing knowledge and subjects, so that all discourse engages/is power, and all subjects speak from positions of power – it is the relative standing that matters (Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1979, 1980).

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

His two most well-known examples of this ‘disciplinary power’ are the confessional chamber and Bentham’s Panopticon (Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992). The interplay of disciplinary power and sovereign power result in what may be termed a society of normalization, and Foucault (1979, 1980) suggests some methodological precautions while studying power: (1) one should try to locate power at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is less legal in character, and thus more potent, rather than the non-existent ‘center’; (2) rather than preoccupying oneself with questions of intention, it is the level of on-going subjugation that needs deep analysis; (3) power establishes a network, thus studying one particular class or individual becomes meaningless; (4) there are limits to the network of power and so an ascending analysis of power from its extremities to the process of its appropriation/exercise is necessary; and (5) power may involve ideological production. Such a perception of power is important because it sees the situational embeddedness of discourse and power, and identifies that every subject (be they subaltern/dissident or dominant) has a position to voice itself – which becomes crucial in the study of organized silencing. Foucauldian perspectives on power are criticized, however, on the charge that they privilege structure over agency, an issue I address shortly in this chapter, while discussing the role of discourse in social change.
Ideology

Ideology, power and hegemony are many sides of the same coin, and exist in dialectic together, in my method of analysis. Burr (1995) comments that though Foucault’s prime focus was the archaeological project of re-voicing marginalized discourses, he “cautioned against seeing certain social conditions as necessarily producing particular discourses… [and was] opposed to the wholehearted recommendation of some discourses rather than others on the assumption that they would be more likely to bring about a better society” (p. 69) simply because the effects of discourse are unpredictable. This observation lies at the core of the problem of relativism alluded to earlier: if we are unsure as to the effects of discourse then how may we decide which is more ‘just’ or not in the long run? Foucault (1980) remarked himself that the exercise of power is “both much more and much less than ideology… [since] power cannot but evolve, organize, and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs” (p. 102). However, Fairclough (1992) argues that this does not necessarily invalidate ideology, but attests to the evolution of discourse/power and the dialectical relationship between discursive formations and extra-discursive structures.

I use Fairclough’s (1992) definition of ideologies here, understanding them to be “significations/constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, social identities), which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of dominance” (p. 87). Such a position is grounded in Louis Althusser’s emphasis on ideology as materially grounded in state apparatuses (or organizational apparatuses, in the case of organizational discourse), but also sees ideology as knowledge in the service of power (see Burr, 1995). Moreover, implied in such a viewpoint is the use of ideology to coordinate socially shared representations, affecting both in-group and out-group communication and reality (van Dijk, 1997). Ideology becomes located both in the orders of discourse (that is, the structure) as well as discourse itself, and becomes naturalized by/naturalizes discursive formations (Fairclough, 1992). While Althusser’s ideology affords the subject an imaginary autonomy such that ideas and representations have no independent existence but are always grounded in institutional apparatuses, Fairclough (1992) sees it
operating more imperfectly. Thus, while subjects are ideologically positioned, they are not completely unaware of these positions and are also capable of acting creatively to restructure positioning practices, so that they are “capable of transcending ideology” (p. 91). Thus, it is not that discourses may lack ideology altogether, but the degree of ideology in and/or shaped by discourse varies.

Hegemony

Discourse as a site of power struggle, shaped by ideology, also involves the principle of hegemony. Using Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony as domination by consensus, critical discourse analysis makes several points. First, in accordance with Foucault’s (1979, 1980) disciplinary power, hegemony “makes people act as if it were natural, normal, or simply a consensus” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 19) to be a certain way. Hegemony thus lies at the heart of organizational colonization (Deetz, 1992) and the structuring of organizational reality (Mumby, 1988) discussed in Chapter 2. Secondly, hegemony is about “constructing alliances and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 92). This becomes relevant when considering the intra and inter-organizational linkages at stake in organizational colonization, and the additional need to examine social practices and discursive practices (production, distribution, consumption and interpretation) while engaging in discourse analysis. Finally, since Gramsci sees subjects as structured by diverse ideologies, hegemony is always under negotiation and renegotiation through constant power struggles (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, while examining the organized silencing of alternative subjects, it is important to realize that voice and silence co-exist as a dialectic pair (Clair, 1998), the hegemonic privileging of the so-called dominant voice is constantly being shaped, and critical discourse analysis may be able to successfully voice dissent (see Chapter 2).

Agency/ Structure

The agency-structure relationship is intrinsically wound together with the role of discourse in social change. Foucault has often been critiqued for underestimating the role of individual agency and overplaying the role of structural factors and rules for discursive formation (see Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). For instance, even though the individual is held to exercise power, s/
he is also subjected to and limited by the same, so that structure assumes priority over agency (Foucault, 1979, 1980). To be fair, resistance is omnipresent with power, especially with what Foucault (1980) calls the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges”, those which have been either buried in formal systemization or disqualified as local/ inadequate. But the over-all sense is “that discourses and their attendant practices form some kind of impenetrable web, locking us all into our oppression for evermore” (Burr, 1995, p. 74). While Foucault (1980) argues that struggles against disciplinary power are continuous, he is ambiguous as to how this struggle may be achieved successfully: the recourse, he says, is “one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty” (p. 108), but does not offer any further clue as to its constitution. While analyzing the interplay between active practices and structural factors, Fairclough (1992) summarizes,

In brief, what is missing is any sense that practice has properties of its own which (i) cannot be reduced to the implementation of structures; (ii) imply that how structures figure in practice cannot be assumed, but has to be determined; and (iii) ultimately help to shape structures. (p. 58)

Yet another drawback highlighted by Fairclough (1992) is that while discourse analysis is usually on the micro-scale, relations of power/ knowledge/ hegemony largely apply to the macro-scale – thus, there is a point of discontinuity between the micro and the macro, and a coherent method of critical discourse analysis needs to bridge this gap.

The way out of this quandary is by conceptualizing a Derridian individual/ society conjoint system, rather than the either/ or dichotomy for agency-structure. As Burr (1995) observes, “if agency and structure are part of one inseparable system, then the effectiveness of human agency is just as real as the determining features of social structure” (p. 108). This understanding of the individual/ society system has already been seen at play earlier: in the relationship between organization/ society/ community/ individual/ stakeholders of Chapter 2 and in the relationship between global/ Gandhian/ Nehruvian/ post-liberalization flows of Chapter 3. Such a perspective also supports the view that discourses are products/ producers of both social structures and individuals, and may be understood as “situated symbolic action” (Heracleus, 2004). Moreover, it underlines how discourse is not merely constitutive in the sense of being
informative, but ‘transformative’ as well (Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Heracleus, 2004; van Dijk, 1997).

The role of both discursive and extra-discursive (or material) formations in creating ‘structure’ must be considered while theorizing on the agency-structure relationship (Burr, 1995; Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992). While I have mentioned the presence of extra-discursive/ material factors earlier, on the topic of ‘weak/ moderate’ social constructionism, I have not shown their explicit role in my method of analysis. The acknowledgement of such factors brings to the fore pre-constituted objects and social subjects, which necessarily limit the role of discourse in effecting social change, but not quite so drastically as perhaps imagined. Adhering to the conjoint-system approach, rather than dominance by either discursive or extra-discursive formations, the constitutive processes of discourse may be “seen in terms of a dialectic, in which the impact of discursive practice depends upon how it interacts with preconstituted reality” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 60). Such a dialectical approach makes sure that neither “the social determination of discourse”, nor “the construction of the social in discourse” (p. 65) are over-emphasized.

Processes of Social Change

Building from the earlier understanding of hegemony as always being negotiated and defended, it stands to reason then that even so-called dominant discourses contain “weak points, places where they may be attacked, and points at which other discourses pose a real threat” (Burr, 1995, p. 74). Accordingly, the possibility for social change via discursive formations remains very real. Change, in this case, may be observed through “forms of transgression, crossing boundaries, such as putting together existing conventions in new combinations, or drawing upon conventions in situations which usually preclude them” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 96). A case in point would be the appropriation of discourses of globalization according to local contexts (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004), or the interplay of various discursive strands that I explore in the study at hand. A discursive event may either reinforce existing consensuses and hegemonies or enter into conflict with them, bringing about this change (see Deetz, 1992, 2003, 2005). Either way, discursive events are deemed to have a cumulative effect on social reality (Burr, 1995,
Fairclough, 1992), so that in a change-situation the initially perceived stylistic contradictions lose their patchwork effect and become ‘seamless’, so to speak. From a Foucauldian perspective, the change discourse thereby enters the realm of normalization.

A dialectical approach may also resolve the macro-micro drawback to critical discourse analysis highlighted earlier. In the first place, there are assumed to be weak linkages or boundaries between the ‘local’ and ‘global’ orders of discourse (discursive structures), which may be relatively strong or weak depending on their articulation (Fairclough, 1992, p. 69). For instance, US standards of corporate responsibility are likely to have a larger impact on so-called global ‘best practices’ of corporate responsibility, rather than Indian standards – but this is not to say that successful work in this regard by an outstanding Indian corporation is not taken note of in the international arena and thus enters the lexicon of ‘good corporate responsibility’ for ‘global firms’ (for instance, in the case of the 2002 report on corporate responsibility of Indian firms, compiled by the UNDP, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and the British Council, among others; see British Council et al., 2002). Cumulative structural changes are created in the orders of discourse, from local to global and/ or global to local, depending on the relative power of subjectivities (Fairclough, 1992, p. 97).

Moreover, the dialectical approach insists that discourse analysis not be restricted to the micro-analysis of the text at hand, but extend to social context/practice and discursive practice. In terms of the micro-analysis, the text needs to be examined keeping in mind the usage of language forms (vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, text structure, force of utterances, coherence), orientation of meanings, textual devices (such as metaphor, humor, cynicism), intertextuality, genres, linkages, distanciation from production-circumstances, and the architecture/design structure used (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 73-78; Hardy & Phillips, 2004, pp. 308-310).

The macro-analysis is connected to the micro, via the study of social practices and discursive practices, which may or may not coincide. By ‘social practice’, Fairclough (1992) primarily means the theatre for ideology and hegemony centered on a text. An analysis of ‘discourse as social practice’ necessarily looks at the socio-historical background/ascendancy of the text and the subject position, the
social actors involved (individual and/or organization), streams of interdiscursivity, external accounts of both the text and actors, link between text and meanings (whether they are closely or loosely tied together; see Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b), and the stylistic elements (form, metaphors, meanings, coherence, presuppositions) used by the text (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 86-96).

While discursive practice may be considered “a particular form of” social practice (Fairclough, 1992, p. 71), the latter may consist of extra-discursive practices as well. Accordingly, the analysis of discursive practice considers in-depth the processes of production, distribution, consumption and interpretation of the text. In this respect, Hardy and Phillips (2004) elaborate that power in the processes of production and transmission is usually in the form of “formal power, by which we refer to authority and decision-making power” (p. 307), access to critical resources, through network links and social relations, and subject-positions granting discursive legitimacy or closure. In the context of organizational discourse, various levels of management within corporations, journalists, public relations agencies, investors, shareholders and stock market analysts hold varying degrees of power related to these processes. Similarly, the consumption and interpretation of the text at various tiers also affects the social reality afforded by it, given that there are “a number of contradictory ways in which knowledge can be consumed”, such that the originally intended meaning of the text may be reproduced/ rejected/ appropriated/ resisted, all in varying degrees, either individually or collectively, privately or publicly, or in an undetermined combination of all (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). In addition, Fairclough’s (1992) analysis of discursive practice includes the simple/ complex form of distribution, channels of distribution, role of social actors in the social practices, social identity of participants, context of situation, and the coherence of interpretation (pp. 78-86).

The Analysis of Organizational Discourse

In a meta-analysis of organizational communication research, Pritchard (2006) finds that the most widespread interpretation of discourse analysis is “analysis of forms of knowledge and practice – particularly forms of management knowledge and practice” (p. 221), which primarily draws from the Foucauldian perspective on discourse, followed by the analysis of rhetoric and rhetorical practices. Here,
I will briefly go over some of the issues and concerns on the analysis of organizational discourse in particular, before elaborating on the sites I study.

For Mumby and Clair (1997), “discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are” (p. 181). Organizational discourse is defined by Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam (2004) to be

the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed. (p. 3)

Accordingly, the researchers list some of the most commonly-used methods of discourse analysis in the organizational context, such as examination of conversations and dialogue, metaphor and trope analysis, organizational narratives, studies of language in use and context-sensitive approaches like critical discourse analysis. Importantly, discourse is “a site of struggle that extends beyond organizational borders to encompass the academic project itself” (p. 14), and is thus necessarily both plurivocal (in terms of being dialectical) and inter-discursive/ inter-textual.

In another meta-analysis, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) identify three broad ways of studying the organization vis-à-vis discourse analysis: as pre-formed object or entity, as being in a constant state of becoming, and as grounded in action/ practices/ discursive forms. The first model treats the organization as a “container”, albeit a socially constructed product, which has material constraints once formed, and locates discourse as an artifact within it. The second model highlights the dynamic (some would say “fragile”; see Conrad, 2004) processes of discourse in organizing, and thus embraces the constitutive role of discourse whole-heartedly in forming the organization and all else. The third model, to which I adhere to, sees organizations as grounded in action, at the level of social practices and discursive forms, so that “agency lies neither in subject nor object, but in a joint mediation between the built-in properties of objects and the intentions and purposes of human subjects” (p. 18). According to Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), none of the three are devoid of chinks in their armor, so that researchers though partial to any one of them need to consider the dialectical tensions and opportunities seen/ afforded by all three. For
instance, Broadfoot et al. (2004) see organizations and discourses as mutually constitutive, so that “any change in one party can spiral into the other, transforming their relationship to each other in a continuous spiral upwards and downwards” (p. 197). Thus, they advocate the study of discourse at various levels and sites (or “moments”) that contextualize and re-contextualize discourse.

Drawing from Fairclough (1992) and Parker (1992), Oswick, Keenoy and Grant (2000) review how organizational discourse analysis may examine concepts, objects and subjects/subjectivities. Accordingly, an example of a ‘concept’ or theory to understand the world may be ‘sustainable development’ or ‘corporate responsibility’, discussed in Chapter 2; various stakeholders in the organizational process become configured as ‘objects’ in the practical world who create various structures, practices and subjectivities, or ‘subjects’ – for example, the ‘nation-building’ subjectivity of corporate responsibility that is sought to be examined in this study. Importantly, “the terms concept, object, and subject not only ‘presuppose each other’ but are mutually implicated in each other” (Oswick et al., 2000, p. 1118).

Despite the prevalence of organizational discourse studies, the so-called “linguistic turn in organizational research” (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a) is clearly not without its warning-signs. Noting the lack of deep reflection on the role of language in fieldwork and data analysis, Alvesson and Karreman (2000a) advocate “discursive pragmatism”, which acknowledges that given the multiplicity of possible meaning, any attempt to claim a complete understanding of the phenomena under investigation is unsustainable and so it is more fruitful to focus on particular situations (p. 147). Taking the meaning associated with discourse for granted is also fallacious (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b), since meaning and discourse may range from only loosely coupled (a case of ‘discourse autonomy’) to strictly bound together (that is, ‘discourse determinism’). The local/ global or micro/ macro situation is also highlighted by Alvesson and Karreman (2000b), in that they identify at least four ‘zones’ of discourse analysis: micro- and meso- discourse (with a small ‘d’) at different levels of the local context, and grand- and mega- Discourse (with a capitol ‘D’) at different levels of the wider context. Constructing a four-dimensional diagram between loose/ tight coupling of meaning and discourse/ Discourse, the researchers
argue that critical analysis of organizational discourse needs to keep in mind the nature of meaning and move between the various levels of discourse/ Discourse to be effective. Interestingly, while they acknowledge Fairclough’s (1992) method of local/global contexts, they comment on “a tension between these two levels” (p. 1134), but admit that there is “no final answer” (p. 1146) to the dilemma other than “continuous reflection” (p. 1147). Reflexivity is propounded by Conrad (2004) as well, when he holds that a dialectical movement among various perspectives (as in Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b) is necessary to avoid either narrow-minded ‘discoursism’ on the one hand, or simple-minded positivism/ structuralism on the other.

The issue of context is also taken up by Sillince (2007) in his argument that though discourse analysis depends on situational context, there is little attempt in studies of discourse to make context an explicit part of the model of analysis. He uses structuration theory to identify four main contexts that determine differential readings of discourse, namely, the context of why determined by reasoning structures, the context of when determined by temporal structures, the context of who determined by political structures, and the context of where determined by territorial structures. Arguing from the structuration perspective, Sillince (2007) says that though context is socially co-constructed through interactions, social change needs to re-define discourses across contexts through each/all of four means: the insertion of cross-contextual discourses, reframing, appropriation, and recursion between discourses with loose/strong ties to meaning (pp. 380-382).

In addition, Putnam, Grant, Michelson, and Cutcher (2005) present various ways of understanding discursive resistance to hegemony in the organizational context: the targets of resistance may be both single and multiple, and may even involve an interested third party (for instance, the media or shareholders, in the case of corporate responsibility); resistance may be practiced in both overt and covert ways, individually and collectively (an example of this is seen earlier in the instances of ‘reading’ discourse resistively, explored by Hardy & Phillips, 2004, and Fairclough, 1992); and resistance may have both intended and unintended consequences, including the altering of subjectivities. Thus, while considering a method of organizational discourse analysis, these notes should be kept in mind.
From this exposition on the concerns of organizational discourse analysis, it is apparent that the method has been widely used in researching organizations and their implications. Allen (2005) notes the variety of projects that have used social constructionism to analyze sense-making and resistive practices in organizational contexts: workplace policies and productivity, organizational identity, ‘doing’ gender or race or sexuality, organizational socialization and organizational impacts in the personal life world. Social constructionism is also used to study the co-creation of corporate responsibility, by O’Connor et al. (2008). Through focus groups, the researchers found that stakeholders (in their case, a group of consumers) have expectations for what constitutes authentic CSR and what does not, and accordingly co-create an organizational reality of corporate responsibility, granting it social legitimacy, rather than tamely accept whatever organizations craft for them.

In particular, Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis method has been used by Livesey (2002), in her study of oil giant Shell’s CSR initiatives in Nigeria. The researcher examined Shell’s first social report, together with various company materials from the external affairs office of Shell International, local operating companies, and corporate web sites. In order to study discourse both as social practice and as discursive practice (production, distribution, consumption, interpretation), she studied media reports, trade journal articles, online conversation threads, reports submitted to governments, accounts of other case studies relevant to the study, other work by the consultants who worked with Shell, and international reports on benchmarks by the United Nations (pp. 320-322). At the close of her exhaustive analysis, Livesey (2002) concludes that despite affirming its commitment to the local communities and discursively trying to align profits with principles, Shell reiterated the primacy of profit margins and markets, and focused on top-down regulation over a more participative communication model, retained the role of business as apolitical despite considerable political unrest in the area, and prioritized industrial growth over real social change (pp. 331-338). In a later essay, however, she emphasizes the constitutive property of discourse, arguing that despite the apparent contradictions in Shell’s discourse the elements of social change that were present should not be discounted and are likely to be effective in the long run (Livesey & Graham, 2007).
Sites and Methods of Analysis

This study focuses on the discourse surrounding the launch of the world’s cheapest car by one of India’s largest automotive companies, Tata Motors, to examine the organizational colonization espoused by the discursive event, the ethic of corporate responsibility evident, and the tactics of organized silencing. An extended case study approach is favored, which “engages the nested and interconnected nature of discursive moments, resources and procedures, vocabularies, strategies and techniques that are used by institutions and individuals to construct and sustain a coherent, stable representation of ‘organization’” (Broadfoot et al., 2004, p. 199).

Case studies provide an opportunity to explore the real-world functioning of organizations in context, stimulate reflection, prompt discussion on alternative courses of action or voices, and serve as an impetus for future action (May, 2006). This becomes vital, when exploring the ethic of corporate responsibility not as initiatives separate from the normal operations of corporations, but dialectically integrated with them. Though case studies describe a “bounded system”, bounded by time and space, the close-in-depth situated analysis uses multiple sources of information (Broadfoot et al., 2004; Cresswell, 1997; Stake, 2000). In this study, I examine the case as a “discursive event” or an instance of discourse (Fairclough, 1992), so that it becomes an “instrumental case study” that may provide insight in a larger issue (Stake, 2000). Case studies involve a dialectic between particularity and generalizability, so questions of selection, organization and presentation of the themes generated become crucial to determining how ‘representative’ the case might be. Though generalizability is not usually a chief requirement for qualitative inquiry (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake, 2000), the relative positions of power, ideology and hegemony play a role in determining generalizability and establishing precedent. In the case at hand, the relative prominence of the organization suggests that the findings of this study may be symptomatic of organizational colonization and ethics of corporate responsibility in India.

While I delve into the actual analysis in Chapter 5, here I detail the sources (or sites) of data and methods of analysis. Importantly, this analysis adheres to the plurivocality of discourse, wherein, “discourse does many things at the same time and over time, in many different arenas, and in ways that
are not necessarily compatible or visible… [so that there is hardly] ever a definitive reading of organizational discourse” (Grant et al., 2004, p. 14). Accordingly, studies of organizational discourse may draw on several methods simultaneously, to analyze different sites of information (p. 9). As Appadurai (1996) notes, though various texts and contexts may be interconnected, they also involve “different logics and metapragmatic features” (p. 187), requiring different modes of inquiry. This is particularly true of Fairclough’s (1992) tri-dimensional method of textual analysis. Thus, while my examination of the social context/ practice surrounding the case is more a surface-level scan, the analysis of the text (media releases) is much more in-depth, oriented toward both micro-level stylistic elements and macro-level interdiscursivity, and my analysis of the discursive practice (news coverage) uses a method more attuned to social memory and emergent themes in the media-story.

**Social Context/ Practice**

In terms of ‘discourse as social practice’, Fairclough (1992) suggests an examination of the social matrix and the macro-level orders of discourse (pp. 237-238). For instance, in his analysis of a television program on Anglo-Irish peace talks, he first discusses the British political situation and identifies some of the key players involved, before launching into the actual analysis of the text, that is, the television program (Fairclough, 1998). In the present study, Chapter 3 has already laid some of the groundwork for studying the social context/ practice of discourse, in problematizing the flows of Gandhian, Nehruvian, post-liberalization and neoliberal understandings of economic progress and corporate social responsibility. I continue detailing the social matrix relevant to the case study in the first section of Chapter 5, by providing a context for the textual analysis to follow. Drawing on both organizational and external sources, I elaborate on the circumstances behind the case study, the corporate reputation of the company in question, and its understanding of corporate responsibility. Accordingly, I examine the corporate web site of Tata Motors (see [www.tatamotors.com](http://www.tatamotors.com)), especially its home page and it’s ‘Know Us’ page (which opens onto several sub-pages like ‘Profile’, ‘Milestones’, ‘Management’, ‘Subsidiaries, JVs’ and ‘Corporate Governance’, to mention a few). The website’s ‘Investor Centre’ page, which is mainly targeted at shareholders, lists financial results, sales numbers per month over the years, transcripts
of conference calls with investors, shareholders satisfaction survey results, shareholder distribution patterns, corporate presentations, and reports and filings to the various government authorities. The ‘Media Centre’ page lists press releases through 2001 to 2008, many of which form the primary text of analysis in the second section of Chapter 5.

In addition to the corporate website, I draw on several documents authored by the organization: namely, the Global Compact – Communication on Progress Report 2007-2008 (Tata Motors, 2008a), the company’s 2007-2008 Annual Report (especially the Chairman’s Statement, Directors’ Report, and Management Discussion & Analysis sections; Tata Motors, 2008d), the Corporate Social Responsibility Annual Report 2007-2008 (Tata Motors, 2008o), and the company’s Toward Sustainability Global Reporting Initiative 2008 (Tata Motors, 2007k). These documents were chosen because they particularly highlight the issue of social change, corporate responsibility and business goals envisioned by the organization. I also consider a variety of external texts: research reports on Tata Motors prepared by stock market analysts (Credit Suisse, 2009; Equitymaster.com, 2008; HDFC, 2009; Indiabulls, 2008), and reports detailing CSR norms in India (many of which have already been referred to in Chapter 3) – the ‘Delivering Value’ report by Mehta et al. (2006), Kumar’s (2004) ‘The state of CSR in India’, and ‘Altered Images’ by Kumar et al. (2001).

Text

In terms of ‘discourse as text’, I examine select media releases issued by Tata Motors, starting with the announcement of the factory project in West Bengal, and ending with the commercial launch of the Nano from its re-located factory. The first media release studied, titled “Tata Motors’ first plant for small car to come up in West Bengal” is dated May 18, 2006, while the last release, titled “Tata Motors announces the launch of Tata Nano” is dated February 26, 2009. There were 23 releases considered in total, of which all were half-a-page in length (not counting the “About Tata Motors” slug at the base of the release, where applicable), except four: “Tata Motors blitzkrieg of new products at its biggest ever presence at the Auto Expo” (dated January 9, 2008, five pages), “Tata Motors unveils the People’s Car” (dated January 10, 2008, two pages), “Tata Motors inducts batch of 80 youth as apprentices at Singur
plant: 311 others under training‖ (dated January 16, 2008, page-and-a-quarter), and “Tata Motors presents
the Nano at the Geneva Motor Show” (dated March, 4, 2008, two pages). I also analyzed Tata Motors
Chairman Ratan Tata’s speech at the unveiling ceremony of the Nano (dated January 10, 2008, two-and-
a-half pages), which was circulated along with the January 10, 2008, press release (see Appendix A for
the complete speech). All the releases were obtained from Tata Motors’ corporate website.

A close textual analysis was used to examine the media releases. The method, adapted from
Fairclough (1992), sheds light both on the social construction of agents (for instance, how is the company
depicted? Who is considered a legitimate stakeholder?), and the social relations between these agents (for
instance, what is the relationship between the corporation and the community? How is corporate social
responsibility understood?). In this mode of inquiry, the genre or stylistic structure of the text becomes
crucially important, as does the negotiation of topics or voices/ silences in the text. Each media release
was examined using a detailed ‘analysis sheet’ that was constructed for the purpose. Each analysis sheet
consisted of five heads, corresponding to different textual elements identified by Fairclough (1992); while
I elaborate below on these heads, the basic working template of the analysis sheet has been presented in
Appendix B.

The first head, labeled ‘social construction’, focused on the construction of social agents through
the media release discourse. It first asked who the narrator or speaker of the text was, that is, whose voice
was most clearly being heard through the media release, whether this speaker was the same as the
producer of the text, and whether s/ he was being construed as active or passive. In some cases, the media
release cited the company’s external public relations agency as second author, or was attributed to a
nameless “spokesman”, or explicitly/ implicitly voiced the concerns of the Organization-State or
Organization-vendor partnership, and these were accordingly recorded. The identity of the speaker was
supplemented by the identity of the person/ community addressed, and whether they were construed as
active or passive. The ‘social construction’ head also took into account the rhetorical schemata used in the
text, for instance, whether the media release was in the form of an ‘announcement’, or a ‘progress report’
or a ‘speech’. A press release was considered as an ‘announcement’ if it offered brand new information
on an event or process that had not been referred to earlier; it was considered a ‘progress report’ if it provided an update on events or situations that had been mentioned in earlier releases. A ‘speech’ was a declaration made by a personality physically present at an event or situation; only one ‘speech’ was included in the corpus studied – Tata Motors’ Chairman Ratan Tata’s speech at the unveiling ceremony of the Nano, on January 10, 2008. Several instances were identified, where the rhetorical schemata employed was that of a ‘progress report’ and the media release suggested that the information had already been announced earlier, but this was not the case – and so it was really an announcement masquerading as a progress report. Such discontinuity has implications for the organization’s strategy toward dissidents, as will be seen later in Chapter 5.

The ‘social construction’ head also considered the identification of themes. Fairclough (1992) defines a theme as “a textual dimension of the grammar of the clause concerned with the ways in which clause elements are positioned according to their informational prominence” (p. 178). Thus, themes are producer-determined information in a clause/sentence, generally corresponding to what is taken as ‘given’ or ‘understood’ information, and used for sense-making purposes. Accordingly, a single clause/sentence may have multiple themes. Closely allied with the concept of themes are nominalizations, which induce the passive in social agents and encourage the abstract entity, rather than the concrete goal, to the extent that the abstract entity displaces the concrete as the main goal of the communicative effort. At this point, it is also important to note the use of particular keywords, the meanings that they signify, and the alternative meanings they may be intended to suppress. Keywords signal relevant themes of a clause or sentence, and may be nominalizations in themselves, but may also consist of concrete and active aims, rather than just nominalizations. All three – themes, nominalizations and keywords – were included under the ‘social construction’ head.

Finally, the metaphors used in the press releases were also considered. Fairclough (1992) focuses on two key metaphors for sense-making: namely, the ‘marketization’ of the life-world that draws on neoliberal capitalist logics, and ‘war/conflict’. Both these metaphors were relevant in the present case study: ‘marketization’ metaphors testify to the neoliberal ‘business case’ of corporate social
responsibility, focused on profit, market and managerialism (see Chapter 2); on the other hand, ‘war/conflict’ metaphors were apparent when considering the dissidence to the organizational project, and the media releases adopt a varyingly aggressive stance towards the land acquisition protesters in Singur. In addition, given the underlying thread of nation-building of corporate social responsibility (see Chapter 3), I searched for references that evoked a ‘building’ metaphor. Importantly, this metaphor had a vast repertoire: from neoliberal logics of ‘building’ capital and an employee base on the right, to the participatory ideals of self-less community and nation-‘building’ on the left. Such a vast span testified further to the dialectical nature of corporate social responsibility meanings in India (see Chapter 3).

The next two heads were relatively straight-forward, given the genre of media releases, and are closely allied with each other; these were ‘pattern of interaction’ and ‘politeness’, respectively. While engaging in interaction analysis, Fairclough (1992) advocates the study of the pattern of interaction, noting specifically the acceptance of views by the narrator and the person(s) addressed, topic control in the interaction and mode of turn-taking, and the presence/absence of a pre-set agenda. By way of ‘politeness’, he examines the presence of interpersonal niceties, whether the interaction is tactful or blunt. Given the media release genre, however, the findings on these two heads are comparatively stable: media releases are, by nature, monologic and contain a pre-set agenda (Bivins, 2007; Newsom & Haynes, 2007), which thus becomes very easy to control, especially when compared to verbal interaction. In some cases, the presence of views apart from the corporate position may be observed, especially in the form of quotations from outsiders, but by and large topic-control is relatively easy and there is little to none turn-taking, given the pre-written format of a press release. Finally, press releases are not usually meant to offend their audiences, and thus are mostly very polite to the person/community addressed or mentioned. Of course, there were some exceptions to these observations, especially in regard to the dissidents to the organizational project, as I will show in Chapter 5.

The fourth head, labeled ‘modality’, was concerned with the degree of affinity the narrator of the text expressed with the proposition articulated in the text, that is, how strongly the narrator stood by his/her position in the text. Modality may be objective, where the position or perspective expressed is shown
to be universal and representative of reality, or subjective, where the position is always attributed to the narrator/agent (for instance, using terms like “In our opinion...” or “I think...”), or even a combination of both. Fairclough (1992) notes four major tools of modality – confirmation of action, expression of solidarity with the agent addressed, laying down blanket-type presuppositions, and engaging in dialogue; the analysis sheets focused on the usage (or otherwise) of these tactics.

Finally, the last head of ‘dialectical ethos’ addressed the confluence of ethics and intertextuality/interdiscursivity. For instance, it examined whether the ethos of the text was humanist (evoking narratives from the life-world), or technocrat (focusing on technological/scientific advancement, usage of jargon, reliance on neoliberal versions of ‘common sense’, etc.), or administrative (curt, gives orders, adopts pseudo-governmental tone). The presence of inherent paradoxes was also addressed – for instance, even in a media release that seems to include diverse voices, there is clear topic control and power hierarchy. The confluence of corporate social responsibility ethics was also tracked under this head: whether there were strains of the ‘business case’, the stakeholder model, the statist model, the ethical-philanthropic model, participatory and community-driven CSR, or some combination of all these. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity were considered under the ‘dialectical ethos’, in terms of what intertextual/interdiscursive linkages were privileged by the text analyzed, with what other texts they were intertextual/interdiscursive, and what the markers of cohesion (both implicit and explicit) were. Expectedly, there was a sufficient degree of overlap between markers of cohesion, keywords and nominalizations.

Once the basic analysis sheet template was prepared, each media release underwent three separate stages of analysis. In the first stage, the releases were typed out in MsWord format, totaling 33 pages, single-spaced, font type Verdana, font size 9. Each release was read to highlight issues of genre, tone, structure, rhetorical schemata and other stylistic elements, and notes were added as comments on the margins. In the second stage of analysis, the release was printed out (with comments at the side) and multiple readings were carried out, according to each of the heads in the analysis sheet, till the bare template was completely filled. The average number of readings during this stage was 6, per media release. The process was repeated for all the releases, so that each of them had a filled-in analysis sheet
corresponding to it. The completed analysis sheets numbered 49 pages in all, single-spaced, font type Calibri, font size 11.

In the final tertiary stage of analysis, both the media releases and their analysis sheets were printed out, and re-read, to draw linkages on the nature of social agents and social relations represented via the media releases. The research questions raised in Chapter 1 (and repeated at the end of Chapter 3) were kept in mind during this process. Importantly, the passage of time and contextual events were explicitly considered while noting the gradual construction of social agents and relations, for instance, in the emergence of the ‘war/ conflict’ metaphor and the treatment of protesters at Singur by the media releases. Colored pens were used to highlight the characteristics pertaining to particular social agents (that is, the organization, the State, protesters, the general community at Singur, potential customers for Tata Motors, etc.), and the metamorphosis of social relations between/ among them was traced, using these color-coordinated markings and scribbled notes in the margins. While the agent-characteristics emerged largely from the ‘social construction’ head of the analysis sheet, the subsequent heads – ‘pattern of interaction’, ‘politeness’, ‘modality’, and ‘dialectical ethos’ – provided details of how they operated, what further meanings they embodied, how they were dialectically aligned with possibly opposing constructions, their relative impact, and so on. A specific mapping of the emergent agent-characteristics with the tools/elements from the textual analysis template has been presented in Appendix C.

The first research question deals with the construction of the Organization as a social agent, and six main characteristics emerged from the tertiary stage of analysis. First, the organization clearly depended on its history/ heritage and its strong corporate reputation; second, it projected a clear sense of what might be termed ‘common sense’, in that it tried to be seen as a rational agent; third, the organization’s technological advancement came to the fore repeatedly; fourth, in terms of what Chapter 2 discussed about neo-capitalism and the ‘business case’ of corporate social responsibility, the organization could be thought of as a ‘neo-capitalist’, with its unique motivations, aims and personalities; fifth, the company was usually seen as an active agent, and a benevolent benefactor for the lesser privileged; and finally, the organization distanced itself from politics and projected itself as a helpless victim in the face
of politically motivated attacks against it. Clearly, each of these characteristics depend on elements from all the five heads of the analysis sheet – not just the first, ‘social construction’ – in order to understand how they play out in the construction of the Organization as social agent.

The second research question pertains to the Organization-State relationship and the construction of corporate development and social responsibility by the organization in terms of nation-building. Accordingly, the five heads of the analysis sheet suggested four perspectives whereby to grapple with the research question. First, the linkages between the organization and the State needed to be examined, with all its attendant dialectics and paradoxes, especially given that the organization strived to portray itself as ‘apolitical’; second, what the organization sees as ‘apolitical’ growth had to addressed, since it seemed to embrace economic growth and development as post-political or beyond politics; third, in the construction of social agents in the media releases, the organization repeatedly stressed on the aspirations of these agents and how its ‘apolitical’ growth would deliver on the aspirations of these various agents, be they employees, customers, Singur residents, and so on, so that these aspirations needed examination; and finally, the organization’s framing of its global fame as constitutive of national progress was also relevant to the nation-building project. It is worthwhile to note that while the first research question dealt almost entirely with the construction of the social agent, the second research question is more involved with the social relation that is crafted and its implications (though, it necessarily includes unpacking of the construction of key stakeholders like the State, local community, etc. as well).

The third research question engages with both social relations and the construction of the social agent – in particular, the land acquisition protesters at Singur. The method of analysis employed, with the temporal sequence of media releases available and creation of individual analysis sheets for each release, allowed for a longitudinal mode of inquiry. In other words, it was possible to analyze the construction of the Singur community (and the protesters) by the organization over a period of almost three years, from the time when there was almost no trouble reported to when matters came to a violent head and the organization relocated its factory. Accordingly, a process-based examination of the third research question has been attempted, in which four ‘stages’ of organizational strategy have been observed. First,
there was the stage of ‘ignore and divert’; second, the stage of engagement (?); third, the stage where the organization adopts an all-out offensive against the protesters; and finally, the last stage where it ignores them again, after it has decided to relocate from Singur. To decipher these ‘stages’, I have been guided by both the ‘war/ conflict’ metaphor highlighted by Fairclough (1992), and the specific organized silencing tactics identified by Deetz (1992, 2005) and Clair (1998), earlier referred to in Chapter 2. Importantly, the ‘stage’ idea should not suggest discrete bounds or phases of organizational action; for instance, the second stage of engagement (with a question mark) may also be thought of as a type of diversion (in the first stage), and so on. Rather, the idea of ‘stages’ signifies the temporal transition and the explicit stance of the organization in the media releases, in terms of a direct acknowledgement (or not) and engagement (or not) with the protesters.

The fourth research question involves the examination of discourse as discursive practice, and is addressed later on.

**Discursive Practice**

In terms of ‘discursive practice’ via production, distribution, consumption and interpretation, I analyze the news coverage surrounding the unveiling of the car in January 2008. Recognizing that there are multiple steps in discursive practice, so that interpretation is never really uniform (Fairclough, 1992; Hardy & Phillips, 2004), I concentrate on the transformation of discourse from media release to news coverage in this study. This transformation, rather than change, (see Foucault, 1972) is invaluable in showing both the selective appropriation of voice/silence from organizational source to (presumably) neutral sense-making in the media, and also the inter-organizational linkages whereby organizational colonization may operate. I compare here the development of stories and editorials in *The Times of India* (Mumbai edition) over a period of three months – December 2007, January 2008 and February 2008 – to get a comprehensive idea of the narrative-scripting and social memory (Deetz, 1992) in the immediate pre-launch, launch and post-launch periods of the Tata Nano, respectively. Accordingly, the role of the media as story-teller comes to the fore in this transformation of discourse and sedimentation of social memory. *The Times of India* is India’s largest read English daily (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006;
Media Research User’s Council, 2007). Given that Indian dailies continue to grow at a strong pace, adding 12.6 million readers from 2005 to reach 203.6 million in 2006 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006), the scope of organizational colonization through newspaper media is particularly significant. In India’s financial capital Mumbai, in addition to occupying the top slot, the media group owning The Time of India also operates the second largest English daily, the Mumbai Mirror, and the country’s largest business daily, The Economic Times. Thus the selection of this particular news media as a site of discourse analysis is validated.

Focusing on the erosion of plurality and the reinforcement of dominant/ hegemonic voices, Deetz (1992) maintains that the emphasis on frozen/ fragmented images and stories results in the blurring of the moral dimension for organizational members to ‘make sense’ of reality. However, a critical deconstruction of the fragmented stories, which takes into account the sequencing of events, characterization employed, authorial role of the narrator, and underlying value system of the audience, allows for the reinstatement of plurality (Mumby, 1988, pp. 111-113). In my search for themes, I draw on Owen’s (1984) method of analysis. Fairclough (1992) suggests a mode of analysis attuned to intertextuality, interdiscursivity and coherence for studying discursive practices (pp. 232-234). Owen’s (1984) original study examined the themes people use to negotiate relational communication; given the formative relationship between themes of social memory and organizational reality (Deetz, 1992), his method was appropriate for this analysis. This method of theme analysis uses three criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. While ‘repetition’ has more to do with superficial and explicit repeated use of the same wording, the criterion of ‘recurrence’ addresses the repetition of the latent meaning behind the text and examines whether a text continually uses the same thread of meaning even though different wording is used to indicate this same meaning. The third criterion of ‘forcefulness’ refers to “vocal inflection, volume or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locations” (p. 275). This is also seen through capitalization, italicization, underlining, increasing the size of print, focusing on particular passages, using exclamation marks, strong/ descriptive parts of speech, superlatives and emphatic statements of other kinds. For instance, consider the following news-excerpt:
They come to see hope emerge on wheels. For this 'lakhtakia' car, as street people have already named it, has enabled millions to dream of a life beyond the motorbike. And, to the discerning observer, has the potential of changing the demography of car ownership in India.

As Ratan Tata himself said later in the day, it was the image of a lower middle-class man on a scooter — the elder kid standing in front of the driver-father and the wife riding pillion with a baby on her lap — that kept playing on his mind. “Why can't this family own a car?” Tata’s Rs 1 lakh car project was the outcome of that nagging image that kept tugging at his soul. (TOI, 2008g, italics added)

In this case, the repeated use of the “1 lakh” reference (INR 1 lakh = US$ 2,500) and the “image” that Tata Motors Chairman Ratan Tata ‘dreamt’ showcase the second criterion of repetition. Recurrence is seen throughout the excerpt, in that the marker of common man’s car is prevalent in both paragraphs; the same theme is rather forcefully articulated through Ratan Tata’s “dream” and the hyperbolic description of how the new car means a “life beyond the motorbike” for “millions”.

During the period under study (December 2007-February 2008), a total of 29 articles concerned with the Nano appeared in The Times of India. The articles were typed out, amounting to 43 pages in all, single-spaced, font type Arial, font size 10. The pages were then printed out, and analyzed for themes according to the criteria outlined above. Emergent themes were marked using colored pens; in some instances, I scribbled notes in the margins, alongside sentences or passages that illustrated a particular theme, or a combination of them. My notes and markings were helpful in collating all the themes. In all, twelve minor themes (hereafter referred to as ‘markers’ or ‘indicators’) were identified from the media coverage, on the basis of Owen’s (1984) three criteria, following which they were reassembled and recombined into four major themes. Hence, five markers emphasizing the historical nature of the Nano launch, positioning India versus the West as rivals, highlighting the international links of Indian business, development of indigenous technology and sophistication, and treating the Nano launch as a harbinger of future Indian advances in the global arena were combined under the head of national progress through global footprint. Similarly, the three indicators stressing the personal valorization of Tata Group
Chairman Ratan Tata, the team cohesion of the Tata Group, and delivering on the aspirations of the so-called common man were reassembled under the head entitled constructing a 'new' Indian citizen. Next, two markers on the Organization-State linkage and the media’s watchdog role vis-à-vis the State were combined under the theme of watching the State. Finally, the two remaining indicators related to either the lack of adequate coverage or unfavorable/ mocking coverage of the protestors against land acquisition in Singur and potential environmental damage were gathered under the anti-national subject theme. As expected, there were several instances where a combination of two or more of these themes/ indicators was apparent in the news coverage. Also, these themes/ indicators are not intended as empirical classifications, but rather to enable further discussion on the generation and arrangement of narrative themes.

The fourth (and final) research question posed at the start of this study was on the transformation of organizational discourse between the media releases and the news coverage. As such, it is based on both the study of discourse as text and as discursive practice. It must be highlighted here that since the method of analysis of the news coverage (discursive practice) was dissimilar from that employed for analyzing the media releases (text), it was clear to me from the outset that the two sites of analysis might well reveal different findings. In fact, it should be apparent by now that Fairclough (1992) and Owen (1984) understand the ‘theme’ in quite different ways: Fairclough’s close textual analysis treats themes as variable, transient and sentence-specific markers, whereas Owen considers them to be more a property of the overall text (rather than each sentence), relatively more stable, if also an underlying property. Hence, I did not anticipate that the findings evident from the examination of one site would be necessarily the same as those from analyzing another; they might have complemented, supplemented or even been wholly different from each other. Again, any difference in findings (opposite or otherwise) was not to be taken as evidence of non-relation, but rather as a fluid dialogue. As Chaudhri and Wang (2007) have found, an analysis of corporate responsibility communication and social reporting in the Indian context constrained to only corporate website discourse reveals contradictory results. This does not detract from the importance of analyzing online communication, however, but urges the further triangulation of
resources, materials and interpretations (see Perez-Chavarria, 2007). In fact, a methodological approach attuned to dialectics is ever on the look-out for sites of discontinuity/ conflict, for it is through the co-existence of such that social change may be theorized and built upon. The collation of findings in Chapters 5 and 6 shows a partial commonality, as also a simultaneous de-stressing of certain elements, in response to the fourth research question.

This thesis may be considered a longitudinal study, in the sense that it examines various texts produced by a number of different authors (the organization, its public relations agency, various journalists, NGO research analysts, stock market analysts), in a number of different forums (the corporate website, the newspaper, client networks of investment analyst agencies, NGO forums, corporate body forums), over a vast span of time (the media releases span nearly three years, the news coverage is for three months in 2008, the NGO reports span 2000-2008, the research reports are during 2008-2009, the corporate website information continues to be updated). Thus, the analysis is clearly process-centric, contextual and historical at once. Moreover, an appreciation of the stylistic uniqueness or genre of the discourse analyzed (for instance, normative style of media releases) leads to an understanding of how the micro-level discourse shapes (and, in turn, is shaped by) the macro-level Discourse.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS: “MORE DREAMS PER CAR”, OR LESS?

As explained in Chapter 4, my mode of inquiry is a tri-dimensional one, drawing on Fairclough (1992) and Owen (1984). Accordingly, this chapter consists of three sections, which examine one by one the social context/practice surrounding the discourse, the actual text (media releases), and the discursive practice that in turn transforms the text (news coverage). By way of this multi-level analysis, I turn the populist tagline of the Tata Nano on its head, and ask whether indeed “More Dreams Per Car” were being created… or less.

Social Context/ Practice: The Tata Motors Credo

The first dimension of social context/practice examines what Fairclough (1992) terms the “social matrix of discourse”. Not only does this matrix include a deeper understanding of the case study at hand, which was introduced in Chapter 1, but also a more thorough understanding of the organization, its heritage and ethos, and its corporate reputation in present times. Moreover, in a brief that extends the earlier exposition of what corporate social responsibility means in the Indian context (see Chapter 3), I examine what the concept means to this particular organization.

The Case Study

Tata Motors Limited (see www.tatamotors.com) is India’s largest automobile company, with revenues upwards of US$ 8.8 billion, the world’s fourth largest truck manufacturer and the second largest bus manufacturer (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2008i). Its Chairman Ratan Tata conceived of the small car project in 2004, “to provide safe, all-weather personal and family transport at an affordable price of Rs 1 lakh” (Tata Motors, 2008d, p. 5), or around US$ 2,500, making it the cheapest car in the world. In terms of a business move, this was considered to be a shrewd, customer-oriented decision: in a country with very low car-penetration (only 7 cars per 1,000 people), and a large gap between prices of two-wheelers and small cars, the company concluded that there was “a huge opportunity” for a cheap, reliable entry-level car, and that “the TATA Nano would address this huge potential in demand” (Tata Motors, 2008d, p. 30).
The economic rationale for the small car project was also couched in humanist narratives appealing to the common man and emerging economy aspirations of a country that was largely perceived to be moving from the ‘developing nation’ category to the ranks of the ‘developed’, which I will show subsequently in this section and the next (for instance, the tagline of the Nano: “More dreams per car”). For now, in order to examine the background of the case at hand, it should suffice to know that news of the small car project was greeted by rampant media and industry speculation. As Tata notes, in his speech in the 2007-2008 Annual Report (Tata Motors, 2008d), it “attracted unprecedented global attention and catapulted Tata Motors onto the world stage”, simply because the price tag had been deemed to be “unachievable” (p. 5) by a profitable car maker.

During 2004-2006, while the company’s engineering teams were working on the small car design, the organization was scouting for possible locations for its new factory for the project. It already had “integrated auto clusters” (Tata Motors, 2008k) at four different sites in India; these were run like mini-towns, consisting of the main Tata Motors factory, the project area where employees lived, and several smaller units for ancillary/ vendor companies (Tata Group, n.d.; Tata Motors, n.d.a.). Moreover, the company also conducted community development initiatives in the surrounding towns and villages, which led to further influx of people from these places (Tata Motors, 2008o). Clusters such as these were highly prized by individual state governments, and several of them offered land in their states for Tata Motors to set up its new small car factory. Finally, on May 11, 2006, the Chief Minister of the state of West Bengal announced that the company would roll out the Nano from his state, for which 997 acres of land was to be acquired from rural farmers in Singur, a site 40 km away from the state capitol Kolkata (Calcutta).

The decision to acquire agricultural land for industrial purposes by the State was greeted by contrasting reactions. On the one hand, the urban media, both local (based largely in Kolkata) and national, were amenable to the decision. West Bengal was the leading state in the eastern region of the country, and had enjoyed a fair degree of industrial and national prominence during British rule in India (in those days, Kolkata was the capitol of British India) continuing on till about the 1970s. But the State
had seen a severe outflow of industry and business since then, and bagging the very prestigious Tata Motors project was seen to be symptomatic of a reversal of fortunes for the state (at least in urban circles and the urban-based media). A quotation attributed to the Tata Motors Chairman in a press release (Tata Motors, 2006) states: “This investment is a reflection of the confidence that the Tata Group has in the investment climate and the Government of West Bengal. We look forward to the opportunity of revitalising the automotive industry in the state.”

In Singur itself, the reaction to the decision was mixed. The owners of the land to be acquired were monetarily compensated by the government, and since many of them were absentee landlords in faraway cities (and countries) who had no real investiture in the plots, few of them had any objections. Several unemployed youth in the area, who were not involved with agriculture and did not own or farm any land, were also keen on the project since Tata Motors had promised to train and employ them in the auto cluster at Singur. The main opposition stemmed from the landless agricultural laborers or sharecroppers, who realized that their source of livelihood was about to be taken from them for a relatively less sum of money, and they did not have alternative means of living (Mukherjee, 2009; Pal & Dutta, 2009). The urban media reported that close to 400 (both registered and unregistered with the State) sharecroppers would be compensated up to a quarter of the amount being given to landowners, a first for land acquisition by state governments in India (Thakurta, 2006). But as Pal and Dutta (2009) show in their analysis, it was not so much a matter of one-time monetary payments that affected the dissidents, as it was the loss of a way of living and a means of livelihood. The researchers note an underlying subaltern narrative, involving deep emotional and ancestral ties to the land they have tilled for generations, where land is treated as permanent and stable, while money is deemed transient, and their own money-management skills are recognized to be insufficient. These subaltern narratives were largely ignored by the urban media, which wondered instead why the state government was “on the backfoot” (Thakurta, 2006), given the monetary compensation offered by it.

However, the urban media did highlight an important component of the protests against the Tata Motors project: the relationship between the State and the local community. West Bengal’s state
government is formed by the pro-rural Communist Party of India (Marxist), which has been in power continuously since 1977. The government had introduced extensive pro-poor rural land reforms during the 1980s (Dreze & Sen, 2005), and was now seen to be acting in concert with a large business house (Thakurta, 2006). Thus, the irony of a pro-rural government that enjoyed a substantial majority in the state legislature ushering in compulsory land acquisition for its constituents cannot be overlooked in this case study, and an important peg of the analysis that follows is the Organization-State linkages that may affect the communities adversely. The State’s defense was threefold. In the first place, re-industrialization was offered as the only possible outlet for the state government to assure its citizens economic growth and progress: in an interview, the Chief Minister of West Bengal stated that the economic benefits of the earlier land reforms had stagnated, and “the state can no longer reap high benefits from agriculture because of too much fragmentation of land” (Sen, 2007). In the second place, it was argued that in a state where almost 68% of the population depended on agriculture (Sen, 2007) and which contained prime agricultural land, it was difficult to allocate land for an industrial project “without including fertile tracts” (Thakurta, 2006). Finally, the State emphasized that it was offering higher monetary compensation than had ever been granted before in India.

Another voice of dissent against the Nano came from environmentalists, who charged that large-scale production of the car would result in unparalleled pollution and congestion in India’s urban centers. Prominent climate scientist Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, who chairs the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), went on record to say he was having “nightmares” about the pollution caused by thousands of Nans on India’s roads (Associated Press, 2008). The link between environmentalist protests and local community dissidence became stronger when several prominent personalities involved in a key environmental dispute in the state of Gujarat entered the fray at Singur: media reports noted allegations that activist Medha Patkar’s involvement in Singur was funded by a rival car company (Konar, 2006), and when the state government barred outsiders from entering the area, following violent incidents at Singur, Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy exclaimed “Do you need a visa to enter West Bengal?” (TOI, 2006a).
The protests at Singur really started gathering steam from around mid-2006, at both the state and national levels. Owing to the prominence of the Tata Motors project, it was perhaps inevitable that political parties would soon get involved. The main opposition party in Parliament (at the national stage) disrupted legislative proceedings, calling on the West Bengal state government and Tata Motors to halt land acquisition proceedings (PTI, 2006), and the leader of the main state-level opposition party (the Trinamool Congress), Mamata Banerjee, personally rushed to the site to organize protests and rallies. The severe anti-land acquisition sentiments came to a head on March 14, 2007, resulting in the death of 50 protestors at Nandigram, another site earmarked for land acquisition (ET, 2007), but the state government remained firm on Singur (Sen, 2007), blaming Banerjee and the opposition party for the violence.

The response of the organization involved, Tata Motors, to this scenario, becomes important in this study. Through most of the fracas and violence at Singur, the organization maintained silence on the issue, delegating voice to the State (that is, the West Bengal state government). Instead, as the following analysis will show, the company’s public face preoccupied itself with various employment-enhancing and training programs for the locals, women’s employment, healthcare clinics and other community development measures at Singur. Thus, the focus for the company seems to be corporate social responsibility at Singur, even before the car factory was completed. While there had been media speculation as early as 2006 that the company would relocate its proposed factory if the situation did not calm down, senior company officials quelled these rumors (see TOI, 2006b). It was only in September 2008 that a press release issued by the company acknowledged the ongoing protests at Singur, and announced a suspension of construction work at the site (Tata Motors, 2008k). In the following section, I examine the curious juxtaposition of voice and silence by the organization on this issue, and ask whether this was not indeed part of its over-all strategy against the dissidents. Importantly, this has ramifications for the Organization-State and Organization-Community relationships.

By mid-2008, the environmentalist connection to the Singur protests had largely been replaced by the leadership of Mamata Banejee and her political party, which was in opposition to the Marxist state government. While it will be worthwhile for future research to examine the gradual silencing of the
environmentalist connection and the centering of the political party in the Singur protests, this issue is not tackled in this study. Instead, it looks closely at how the company uses the Organization-State linkage and the construction of corporate development as nation-building to justify its subsequent relocation from Singur to another region in the country. This recalls Garvey and Newell’s (2005) observation on the power of corporations to easily shift capital entirely, which acts as a powerful bargaining tool against communities who might negotiate for fairer terms. In the following section, I will show how the company systematically and sequentially constructed the Singur protesters as volatile, anti-progress, anti-national, and with politically motivated interests. When the organization finally announced its move from Singur, it made clear that its actions “were entirely due to the continued agitative actions by the opposition party led by Ms. Mamata Banerjee with total disregard for the rule of law”, while describing itself in a humanist sense to be in “extreme anguish” at the decision (Tata Motors, 2008m). The textual analysis that follows will reveal an important appropriation of the nation-building ethic of corporate responsibility, and the framing of economic growth as national progress, to Other views opposed to the organization’s.

_Tata Motors: Corporate Reputation_

The US$ 28.8 billion revenue-earning Tata Group is India’s largest privately held company, in terms of both revenues and market capital, operates across 98 countries, employs 300,000 people and has 2.9 million shareholders (Tata Group, n.d.; Tata Motors, 2008j). In January 2007, one of its group companies, Tata Steel, acquired Anglo-Dutch steelmaker Corus for around US$ 12 billion, making it the fifth largest steel manufacturer in the world – the largest overseas acquisition by any Indian company till date (Tata Steel, 2007). But the group also has a deep-rooted history, closely woven with that of the country. Whether it is in accounts of the group’s founder’s famous cock-a-snook at India’s colonial rulers by building India’s finest hotel in 1903, or its role in the cotton and iron-and-steel booms of the pre-independence era, the Tata group cultivated and acquired a distinctive nationalist aura (Lala, 2007). This is seen most notably in the group’s slogan: “Improving the quality of life of the communities we serve”.

The group may be classified as a “family business network” (Carney, 2005), with the chairmanship of the group traditionally handed down to a member of the extended Tata family, and a
holding company Tata Sons at the apex of the cross-linked network of group companies – in accordance with the conventional Eastern emphasis on family ties (Cushman & Kincaid, 1987; Dissanayake, 1987; Mehrotra, 1982). The Tata organizational culture is widely recognized as one where shows of naked ambition are frowned upon, while reticent, quiet dedication is deemed reward-worthy (Ellis, 2002; Surender & Bose, 2008) – harkening back to the perceived national cultural trait of inward orientation. The focus on quiet performance over overt favoritism is also seen in that there are several non-Tatas at the helms of some of the most high-profile group companies like Tata Consultancy Services (software), Tata Steel (steel) and Tata Motors itself.

In many ways, Tata Motors embodies the group’s dual emphasis on traditional values and energized global aspirations. Formed in 1945, the company has revenues of US$ 8.8 billion, is listed on both the major Indian stock exchanges as well as the New York Stock Exchange, and is ranked the world’s 20th largest auto-maker, fifth largest medium and heavy truck manufacturer, and second largest bus maker (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2008i; OICA, 2007). Most recently, it acquired the iconic Jaguar and Land Rover brands from Ford Motors (Tata Motors, 2008c). Even though the company’s main earning segment is that of commercial vehicles, it launched India’s first completely indigenously manufactured passenger car, the Indica, in 1998 (Tata Motors, n.d.b.). The organization has consistently been voted as one of India’s most trusted, most socially responsible, and most responsive to national needs (Kumar et al., 2001; Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a). Its corporate reputation showcases several characteristics. These are meant to serve not so much as definite themes emerging from rigorous analysis, as they are to indicate possible areas for a more detailed analysis to shed further light on. (For instance, the close textual analysis of the press releases and the thematic examination of the news coverage show more effectively how the duality of history/heritage and modernization/technological advancement plays out dialectically.)

*History/Heritage.* The company (and indeed the group) repeatedly stress on its long history. In its website, the company uses terms like “true to the tradition of the Tata Group” (‘Home’ page, Tata Motors, n.d.a.) that showcase the organization’s lineage and development. This is especially seen in the
‘Milestones’ page of its website, where the company focuses on its “long and accelerated journey” that has been honed by its long history and tradition, and its landmark corporate developments are often seen as vignettes of history-in-the-making. While the primary purpose of such a page is presumably to show the progress in technological development of the company, it also highlights breakthroughs in sales targets, market positions and engineering efforts. Importantly, even the organization’s global links and partnerships are seen to be part of a historical process, starting with its first international contracts and forays into the world-market (“1948: Steam road roller introduced in collaboration with Marshall Sons, UK”), and continuing onto present business moves (“2009: Tata Marcopolo Motors’ Dharwad plant begins production”). External accounts of the company also emphasize its history/heritage, while talking about its long tradition of adhering to the trusteeship model of corporate responsibility (Mehta et al., 2006), or the role it has played through the Independence Movement and onto the post-colonial nation-building exercise (Kumar et al., 2001). Speculation regarding a successor to the current group Chairman repeatedly dominates news headlines (see Ellis, 2002), which also feeds into the social construction of the organization (and group) as one with an ancient and illustrious lineage.

Nation-Building. Closely related to the history/heritage peg is the perception of Tata Motors as a company strongly invested in nation-building. This is seen explicitly in its commitments to align corporate responsibility goals with national aims and actions (Tata Motors, 2008o), its stress on ties with the Armed Forces of the country (‘Manufacturing’ page, Tata Motors, n.d.a.), and its repeated goals of creating better employment situations and a “refulgent future” (‘Profile’ page, Tata Motors, n.d.a.) for India’s citizens. To an extent, the auto industry’s close ties to the national economy are responsible for this emphasis on nation-building (as the Chairman makes clear at the start of his statement in the 2007-2008 Annual Report, and several research reports also note; see Equitymaster, 2008; Indiabulls, 2008; Tata Motors, 2008d). This is also stressed by the organization in the rhetoric surrounding its products and processes (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2008d) – whether it is in describing the Indica as the nation’s first indigenously built car, or the Nano as the “People’s Car” to provide mobility to all Indians, or its description of several production processes as India’s “first” and/ or “only” (crash test facilities, for
instance). In some cases, such as in the following excerpt from the introduction by the company’s Managing Director in a CSR report (Tata Motors, 2007k), there is a juxtaposition of the nation-building idea with neoliberal profit motives, emerging economy aspirations of citizens, industrial galvanization of the country and local community development:

In coming years, as India moves on the path of economic development at a faster pace, the demand of vehicles for private as well as public transportation is expected to increase. Improvement in road connectivity across the country through various on going road development projects is also expected to trigger the demand of goods transportation vehicles. Tata Motors is confident that the wealth generated as a result of development would not only power the business but would also be ploughed back in the conservation and enrichment of environment and for greater prosperity of the community. (p. 3)

A question that comes to mind here: what kind of a nation does Tata Motors see itself building? The images on its corporate web site typically represent urban citizens who would drive a car or engineering / industry professionals and relatively prosperous famers who use the large commercial vehicles and heavy tractors the company produces (Tata Motors, n.d.a.). The aspirations it sees itself fulfilling thus belong to a relatively privileged class of Indians:

The demand for a better lifestyle has enhanced consumption levels and rapid growth in several areas like retail chains, cellular phones and cable and satellite television. The Company, with its wide portfolio is expected to benefit from improvement in lifestyle and higher aspiration levels in passenger cars and potential growth in freight movement. (Tata Motors, 2008d, p. 30)

While the company does mention poorer rural folk in its vision for CSR (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008o), these individuals do not get splashed across the website in flash presentations, as the rest do, and must be satisfied with being portrayed on the pages of its CSR documents – which arguably, not many visitors to the web site would access, unless they are avowedly there to check up on the company’s CSR record.
Technological Advancement. As a manufacturing sector company, it is perhaps inevitable that Tata Motors emphasizes its reputation as a technologically advanced corporation. It is seen as a path-setter in areas of scientific and technological development, whether it is in terms of new products, world-class quality standards, innovative engineering processes, specialized safety and comfort facilities, or even technologically sound management processes (Equitymaster, 2008; Indiabulls, 2008, Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2008d). In many cases, this technological advancement is billed to be “India’s first”, which feeds into both the image of the company as a maker-of-history, as also that of innovative nation-builder. On the ‘Manufacturing’ page of its corporate web site, it declares,

Tata Motors owes its leading position in the Indian automobile industry to its strong focus on indigenisation. This focus has driven the Company to set up world-class manufacturing units with state-of-the-art technology. (Tata Motors, n.d.a., italics added)

Importantly, technological advancement is stressed not merely in terms of new strides or processes, but ground-breaking ways of looking at old processes and designs – in the emphasis on cost-cutting, thrifty innovations, adaptation to local contexts, and good teamwork – leading to important advances for the organization (Equitymaster, 2008; Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008d). By stressing that innovation is the brainchild of good teamwork, there is an infusion of a humanist narrative in the normally machine-centric theme of technological advancement; accordingly, the Chairman observed,

No words would ever adequately recognize the spirit, dedication and commitment of the people in Tata Motors who have faced adversity and major crises, delivered products which were not considered possible and repeatedly found solutions for situations which have thwarted many an organization. (Tata Motors, 2008d, p. 7)

Technology thus is humanized not just in terms of customer safety and comfort (‘Safety’, Tata Motors, n.d.a.), but also in terms of innovative spirit, as “research provides the much-needed inspiration for the birth of new ideas, which in turn breathes new life into products” (‘Research’, Tata Motors, n.d.a., italics added). The corporate literature thus manages a balancing act between the liberal sprinkling of technocrat
and managerial jargon on the one hand, and the humanist narrative of team effort, dynamic personalities and human ideas on the other.

**Global Footprint.** A large part of the organization’s corporate reputation is its sheer size and impact on the global scale. In both the ‘Milestones’ and ‘Profile’ page of the corporate website, Tata Motors highlights its operations in foreign markets, marketing ties and partnerships with international companies, formation of joint ventures and subsidiaries in foreign countries, and overseas product launches (Tata Motors, n.d.a). This is also true of the “About Tata Motors” slug, found at the end of some of the company’s media releases, which showcases the organization’s global footprint and its position as a national market-leader (Tata Motors, 2008j):

With over 4 million Tata vehicles plying in India, it is the leader in commercial vehicles and the second largest in passenger vehicles. It is also the world's fifth largest medium and heavy truck manufacturer and the second largest heavy bus manufacturer. Tata cars, buses and trucks are being marketed in several countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and South America. Tata Motors and Fiat Auto have formed an industrial joint venture in India to manufacture passenger cars, engines and transmissions for the Indian and overseas markets; Tata Motors also has an agreement with Fiat Auto to build a pick-up vehicle at Córdoba, Argentina. The company already distributes Fiat branded cars in India. Tata Motors’ international footprint includes Tata Daewoo Commercial Vehicle Co. Ltd. in South Korea; Hispano Carrocera, a bus and coach manufacturer of Spain in which the company has a 21% stake; a joint venture with Marcopolo, the Brazil-based body-builder of buses and coaches; and a joint venture with Thonburi Automotive Assembly Plant Company of Thailand to manufacture and market pick-up vehicles in Thailand. Tata Motors has research centres in India, the U.K., and in its subsidiary and associate companies in South Korea and Spain.

The company prides itself on its global links and aspirations, and expects to soon “take its place in the global auto industry as a credible international automobile company” (Tata Motors, 2008d). Importantly, global footprints are not touted merely in terms of corporate ties, but also “world-class manufacturing
units with state-of-the-art technology” (‘Manufacturing’, Tata Motors, n.d.a.), said to be at par with the best manufacturing anywhere in the world. External reports by investment analysts and stockbrokers also underline the company’s global footprint, by taking into consideration issues like rising commodity prices, the global economic situation, impact of overseas partnerships/subsidiaries on the company’s bottom-line, all of which are deemed as important as (if not more than) domestic growth factors (Equitymaster, 2008; HDFC Securities, 2009; Indiabulls, 2008). For instance, the company’s stock was downgraded by several investment houses, following its absorption of Jaguar and Land Rover, owing to the financial constraints it might face.

Responsibility. Finally, the company is perceived to be a highly responsible one – to its shareholders, employees, customers, vendors/partners and the general public. Responsibility to shareholders is rooted in full and complete disclosure of financial details, stress on corporate governance, transparency of business operations and regular interaction with investors via conference calls or quarterly meetings (Credit Suisse, 2009; Kumar, 2004; Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008d). With news of a recent high-profile corporate governance scandal in India, investment analysts have arguably become even more discerning on the issue, and Tata Motors earned some flak for its handling of the Jaguar and Land Rover deal (Credit Suisse, 2009; HDFC Securities, 2009). However, on the whole, the company continues to have a good reputation as a responsible company (Credit Suisse, 2009; Indiabulls, 2008; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006), partially as a reflection of the history/heritage and nation-building pegs examined earlier.

Even in terms of technological advancement and the company’s business operations, Tata Motors repeatedly stresses that it is attuned to customer needs for safety and comfort, minimizing emission norms and other pollution factors, and fuel-efficiency to save customers’ gas money (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008d). For instance, on the ‘Profile’ page of its corporate web site, the organization declares that “the foundation of the company’s growth over the last 50 years is a deep understanding of economic stimuli and customer needs, and the ability to translate them into customer-desired offerings through leading edge R&D” (Tata Motors, n.d.a.). Vendors/partners are assured of the organization’s support and
partnership, in terms of sales agreements, marketing strategies, and new innovations; for example, in the Nano case study, the company’s partners/vendors have been repeatedly mentioned in the media releases, which also cited safety of workers of these vendor/ancillary firms as one of the main reasons for its subsequent pull-out (Tata Motors, 2008k). Finally, the organization focuses on its commitment to the general public by mentioning its ties and links with the state and central governments, its community development initiatives, its continuing research and development on reducing its carbon footprint and engaging in environmentally sound production processes, and highlighting its prior record as a good corporate citizen (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008d, 2008o). CSR reports by external parties report that the Tata group is continually regarded to be one of the most trusted Indian companies (Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006).

The social context/practice of the Nano launch indicates that the car was (and continues to be) crucial to the organization’s reputation. It enjoys pride of place on the cover of its Annual Report, and is repeatedly mentioned in the Chairman’s Statement, Director’s Report and MD&A as something to “dramatically change Tata Motors’ market position, reach and visibility” (Tata Motors, 2008d, p. 7). The car is also featured prominently on the ‘Home’ page of the corporate website, has two whole paragraphs dedicated to it on the ‘Profile’ page, and several entries related to it in the ‘Milestones’ page (Tata Motors, n.d.a.). The Singur factory is also mentioned as a paradigm of corporate social responsibility in the company’s Towards Sustainability report (Tata Motors, 2007k), the Global Compact Progress Report (Tata Motors, 2008a), and the Corporate Social Responsibility Annual Report (Tata Motors, 2008o). The close textual analysis of the media releases will also show how the company regards the Singur protests as tarnishing its heritage and reputation as a socially responsible company. From an external perspective, the launch is deemed to be of particular importance to the company: while some stock market analysts are critical of the company’s ability to commercially roll out the car, given the controversy around it, and thus downgraded the stock (HDFC Securities, 2009), there were others who regard the Nano as one of few saving graces in the current tempestuous business situation for the company, arguing that the sales revenues from it should partially cushion Tata Motors from rising costs and falling demand in other
segments (Equitymaster, 2008). Thus, the Nano is seen to be highly important to Tata Motors’ corporate reputation from both a ‘business case’ perspective, and a public relations point of view.

**Tata Motors: Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility**

The company’s reputation is strongly related to its understanding and practice of corporate social responsibility. This is apparent already from the organization’s emphasis on responsibility, history/heritage, nation-building, customer safety and environmental protection, as part of its reputation. On the home page of its corporate website, the company prominently features a passage from its ‘We Care’ page on social responsibility, proclaiming that it is “committed in letter and spirit to Corporate Social Responsibility” (Tata Motors, n.d.a.). Again, its ‘Awards’ page highlights recognition not only of the company’s high quality standards and technological advancement, but also issues of corporate governance and corporate social responsibility (Tata Motors, n.d.a.). As an investment report (Credit Suisse, 2009) stresses, qualitative issues such as corporate governance, disclosure of financial details and shareholder responsibility are crucial to a company’s reputation in the 21st century, at par with traditional markers of financial health such as profit-making capability and core business strengths. Thus, corporate social responsibility as understood and practiced by Tata Motors becomes important as a social context/practice to this study. In an economy-wide survey, researchers reported that “when company executives and workers were asked to name the most socially responsible Indian company, an overwhelming number named the Tata Group for reasons that give heavy weightage to ethical behavior, environmental care, and social welfare schemes for the community” (Kumar et al., 2001, p. 14). As I draw on several sources to examine how the company regards CSR, it will be readily apparent that there is in fact a confluence of ethics and ideas (see Chapter 3) that ultimately shape its meaning.

In the first case, CSR is seen to be a very structured process at Tata Motors, in that it is not considered an ad hoc initiative, but rather a well-planned procedure, which takes into account the needs of the target community. In it’s corporate social responsibility annual report, a senior-level manager says that “a structured process has facilitated co-ordination among team members, continuous experience sharing across locations, monitoring and evaluation of all CSR programmes and periodic reporting, giving
CSR activities at Tata Motors a Company wide synergy” (Tata Motors, 2008o). All organizational members are expected to ascribe to the set norms and standards of CSR, which are supposed to be both internalized as well as institutionalized, through concrete measures such as the Tata Code of Conduct (Tata Motors, 2008a), the Tata Protocol (Tata Motors, 2008o) and the Code of Corporate Disclosure Practices (Tata Motors, 2007k). Four clear areas of CSR are identified by the company: health, enhancing employability, education and environmental protection (Tata Motors, 2008o). While the level of pre-planning may differ from location to location, there is an admission that the company is continuously moving toward a more concerted, structured process on CSR, rather than encouraging an ad hoc approach. A divisional manager at a relatively new company location says, “We are moving towards a more structured CSR programme and are in the process of establishing a dedicated team” (Tata Motors, 2008o).

This is important, considering that most Indian corporations do not have a definite CSR plan in mind (Balasubramaniam et al., 2005; British Council et al., 2002; CREM, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007). The structured design at Tata Motors may be the result of two major factors: the company’s long history of social responsibility, so that CSR is seen as a tradition or heritage at the company, and the active involvement of senior-level management. Impressions of CSR officials and other employees at Tata Motors (see Tata Motors, 2008o) bears out the external perception (Kumar et al., 2001) that the company has a history of being involved in socially responsible activities, community development and pro-national activities. For instance, this is clearly evoked in the Towards Sustainability report (Tata Motors, 2007k), where the company’s Managing Director repeatedly uses phrases like “the Company’s heritage of returning to the society what it earns” and “Tata Motors has an illustrious history of conserving and regenerating the natural environment” (p. 2). In the second place, field workers attest to the strong interest in CSR activities by plant general managers and other senior management, which sets an example for junior-level employees and encourages field workers in turn to work harder. A community services worker at the organization says,
I feel fortunate and highly privileged to work in CSR. Here, with Tata Motors, we enjoy a lot of autonomy in financial and programmatic decision making. Also our senior leaders get fully involved thereby extending their support and encouragement to us… The reputation and integrity that the Group commands in the society and the ethical values through which it conducts business provide strength and inspiration to work tirelessly for the community. (Tata Motors, 2008o)

The institutionalization of CSR at the organization is considered to be because of both “the commitment of our senior management” and “the legacy of the Tata Group” (Tata Motors, 2007k, p. 8). Management-led CSR activities are part of the more general trend in India (British Council et al., 2002; Mehta et al., 2006; NASSCOM Foundation, 2007).

The Tata Motors credo tends to treat CSR activities as “part of all business processes” (Tata Motors, 2008o) and the normal day-to-day operations of the company. For instance, on the ‘Profile’ page of the corporate web site, it declares it’s vision to be the “best in the manner in which we operate, best in the products we deliver, and best in our value system and ethics” (Tata Motors, n.d.a.). On the one hand, while this definitely encourages a more serious outlook on CSR, it also tends to further the neoliberal ‘business case’ for corporate responsibility, which links the public relations gains from good CSR practices to the company’s bottom-line through a complex feedback loop involving CSR, corporate reputation, generating customer favor and finally ending with stronger sales. As a senior-level employee observes, “There is a strong business sense in investing in CSR, in so far as corporations benefit in multiple ways by operating with a perspective broader than their own immediate business results. These benefits can range from brand differentiation, boost to recruitment and retention, risk management and license to operate, to more individual goals of personal satisfaction” (Tata Motors, 2008o). The company’s Towards Sustainability report (Tata Motors, 2007k) starts off with a note from the Managing Director on the economic trends in the country and Tata Motors’ planned response to the same (p. 2); it also has a section devoted to ‘Economics’, which uses management jargon liberally, for instance, “a comprehensive system of control, focused on mitigation of risks to ensure achievement of objectives” (p. 9). While discussing the various stakeholders of the company, pride of place goes to its shareholders, who
dominate the first and largest chunk in the ‘Stakeholder Engagement’ section (p. 6). Shareholders and investors are arguably the most important stakeholders for the organization, judging from the clear financial justification offered for CSR activities in the Toward Sustainability report (Tata Motors, 2007k), the annual CSR report (Tata Motors, 2008o), the ‘Investor Relations’ page of the corporate website (Tata Motors, n.d.a.), and the company’s Annual Report (Tata Motors, 2008d). In several instances, the words ‘shareholder’ and ‘stakeholder’ are used interchangeably, as in: “There are several ways that have been established to facilitate two-process of communication between stakeholders and the Board of the Company” (2008d, p. 6).

A strong bias towards technocrat environmentalism (Peterson, 1997; Peterson & Norton, 2007) may be seen in the company’s CSR agenda. Reminiscent of the Brundtland (1987) definition of sustainability, Tata Motors (n.d.a.) declares on the ‘We Care’ page of its web site, that “Tata Motors believes in technology for tomorrow. Our products stand testimony to this. Our annual expenditure on R&D is approximately 2% of our turnover…” In another instance, a senior-level manager at the company uses language eerily similar to Elkington (1998), in describing corporate social responsibility as “the focus of companies on the ‘triple bottom line’ of ‘people, planet and profit’” (Tata Motors, 2008o).

Importantly, a large part of the company’s CSR activities is dominated by attempts to reduce environmental hazards and damages, and this is mainly sought to be achieved by a greater focus on technological advancement, product responsibility, R&D innovations, recycling/ reclaiming products and by-products, using/ promoting alternative energy sources, and global trade (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a). Environmental responsibility is seen to operate through a very structured and managerial blue-print, involving internationally set guidelines and standards, specific objectives and targets, system monitoring, review processes and various indices for sustainable development (Tata Motors, 2008a).

Together with environmental protection, community development forms a core area for the organization’s CSR work. This broad head covers both employees and locals living in areas surrounding the company’s project areas. Tata Motors (2007k, 2008a) prides itself on enhancing safe working conditions for its workers, encouraging a “collaborative approach to [the] company union” (2007k, p. 29),
internal career advancement and ethical professional behavior. The strong emphasis on employee satisfaction and the prominent featuring of senior managers’ inputs on worker conditions and opportunities in its various reports (Tata Motors, 2007k, 2008a) also testified to the team-characteristic identified earlier. But the company also expresses responsibility for communities living in areas around its factories and industrial units, especially the rural folk. Importantly, it is acknowledged that such development is complex and needs to take into account community needs and participation: the divisional manager at Singur says, “Working for CSR in Singur means grappling with several complex issues. I am deeply touched and inspired by the concern that the Company has in ensuring that they go much beyond legal mandates in ensuring that the fruits of development are not limited to any section of the population but spread far and wide” (Tata Motors, 2008o). In several other instances, the company stresses on “active involvement of the community members” (Tata Motors, 2007k, p. 8) and encouraging “self-sufficiency with the aim to improving the confidence, morale and lives” (‘We Care’, Tata Motors, n.d.a.).

However, the elixir prescribed for developmental ills is often urban-based modernization measures, such as donation of computers to a school (Tata Motors, 2008l), or training women to cook or make uniforms for plant-employees (Tata Motors, 2007b), or training rural folk to be factory-employees (Tata Motors, 2007a) – a case in point being Singur itself. Moreover, these measures – and their representation in various press releases or company-authored texts – reinforce the role of the organization as active benefactor, while the community is relegated to a passive recipient. Consider the following excerpt from the company’s CSR report, which presents a testimonial from a native of Singur. The excerpt starts off with the introduction that “with the opening of Singur plant, life changed” (italics added), and then allows the first person account: “The opportunity provided by the Company is a boon for my family… I have also become more disciplined and the work ethics that a corporate like Tata Motors teaches has helped me enhance my personality” (Tata Motors, 2008o). While the training program offered by the organization has obviously impacted this young man’s life greatly, his economic independence is still clearly held hostage by its pleasure in employing him. Moreover, the stress on how the company’s operations have completely changed the lives of the people in Singur does little to inspire self-sufficiency,
and provokes an image of economic dependency instead. Admittedly, this is not a uniform situation, and some case studies may show a greater degree of community participation than others depending on the stage of CSR activity in the area – for instance, in another case study reported in the CSR report (Tata Motors, 2008o), the community took inputs from a Tata Motors-supported grassroots organization and constructed an irrigation system for the surrounding farmland.

The classification of Tata Motors’ understanding of CSR as a purely neoliberal ‘business case’ is thus problematic. In several instances, the CSR credo repeatedly stresses on ‘beyond compliance’ issues and field workers testify that social responsibility at Tata Motors is quite independent of the business producing a profit – something which the neoliberal capitalist project hardly concurs with. In the same passage that he describes CSR as focusing on the “triple bottom line”, a senior-level manager asserts that “this obligation is seen to extend beyond statutory obligation to comply with legislation and sees the Company voluntarily taking further steps to improve the quality of life for the local community and society at large” (Tata Motors, 2008o). Another case study asserts that “empowerment is more than earning capability” and involves an essential negotiation of traditional cultural values with economic needs and roles (Tata Motors, 2008o). Thus, there are clear traces of a community-focused CSR agenda here as well.

Finally, the Tata Motors credo involves a definite nation-building ethic in its role as a socially responsible organization. Its CSR work is seen to be community-building and nation-enhancing, both in terms of creating new opportunities and allowing modern development in rural areas (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008o). The four core areas of the company’s CSR activities are considered vital to the nation-building project, tapping into the upward mobility aspirations of ordinary citizens, especially the goals of enhancing employability and education. Moreover, the very first guiding principle (there are 25 in all) enshrined in the Tata Code of Conduct (Tata Motors, 2008a, p. 2) is “national interest”, followed closely by “corporate citizenship” (number 10) and “citizenship” (number 23). As a divisional manager says, “From philanthropy to Corporate Social Responsibility, the journey has been one that started with a vision of benevolence, the vision that wanted to see India become not necessarily an economic
superpower but a “happy nation”, which visualized developing not just a company, establishing a factory, but the development and growth of townships and communities around” (Tata Motors, 2008o).

Accordingly, partnerships with local, state-level and national agencies to further development work and training are emphasized at the company (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008o). Independently organized CSR activities, or efforts with private NGOs, are often tied/ allied with national goals and objectives on the matter. For instance, in its CSR annual report (Tata Motors, 2008o), the company stressed the “alignment of the CSR programmes with national and international goals” and noted that “the traditional role of the State is evolving from government-led and government-owned training systems towards creating an enabling environment for enterprises and individuals, employers and employees, to invest and actively participate in a collective training effort” – signaling a blend between the neoliberal ‘business case’ and statist models of corporate responsibility (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Directly linking the company’s economic gains to expanding public transport systems and increasing national investment in infrastructure is another way the company bills itself as part of the nation-building project (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008d). In efforts such as training programs, national statistics on employment are often cited to clarify the deeper implications of the CSR project (Tata Motors, 2007k, 2008a, 2008o).

Another aspect of the nation-building aspect of Tata Motors’ CSR activities is the privileging of the urban voice, as opposed to the rural one. On the one hand, corporate social responsibility via technologically advanced better products and environmentally sound processes is seen to benefit the urban users of such products, or the residents of cities where they are mostly used (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008d). The company stresses repeatedly on the emerging economy aspirations and “growing awareness” (Tata Motors, 2008d, p. 31) of urban Indians, who want better, cleaner, cheaper and more fuel-efficient mobility. Moreover, by focusing on shareholders and investors as the main stakeholders of the organization (Tata Motors, 2007k, 2008d), in line with the neoliberal ‘business case’ of corporate responsibility, the urban voice is privileged again. Training programs for rural-based employees are designed to transfer them from their ‘backward’ villages to technologically advanced
‘project areas’ of the company, most of which are arranged according to an urban grid or are located on the outskirts of major townships (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007c, 2007f, 2007k, 2008h, 2008o). When issues and concerns such as burgeoning (or recessionary, as the case may be) global trade, national GDP figures and urban congestion are emphasized by the organization in its website (Tata Motors, n.d.a.), Annual Report (Tata Motors, 2008d) and various documents on CSR and sustainable development (Tata Motors, 2007k, 2008a), it is again the urban voice that gets privileged. In cases where the company is shown to be an active benefactor for a passive recipient community, the underlying ethos is that of neoliberal modernization development (see Melkote & Steeves, 2001), involving a transfer of technology, education, values or people to the ‘advanced’ urban center from the supposedly backward rural periphery.

The study of discourse as social context/practice here is meant to set the stage for the more in-depth textual analysis that follows. Accordingly, the case study, with all its political ramifications, has been introduced, so that the themes generated from the textual analysis may be contextualized better. Moreover, the existing corporate reputation of the organization in question – as one which prides its history/heritage, technological advancement, role in nation-building, global reach, and responsibility to stakeholders – becomes vital in understanding the dialectics that emerge from the textual analysis. Finally, in order to probe the organizational colonization through CSR theory, it has been important to understand what exactly the organization here understands and propagates as good corporate responsibility. This allows the analysis to proceed onto the next stage, that of discourse as text.

Textual Analysis: Media Releases

In all, 23 media releases and one speech were examined as part of the ‘discourse as text’ dimension of this study. In Chapter 4, I outlined the procedure of close textual analysis, the various stages of examination of the texts, and the main issues sought to be examined, that is, the social construction of agents and social relations between them. Importantly, the method of analysis pays close heed to the genre of the text: the implications of studying media releases in-depth, rather than (say) the corporate website or the Annual Report of an organization. Accordingly, this section has four main heads: first, I analyze the normative media release structure; next, I examine the construction of the organization as
social agent in the media releases; third, the Organization-State relationship and the depiction of corporate progress and responsibility as nation-building is studied; finally, the organizational strategies to Other the dissidents (in this case, the Singur land acquisition protesters) are analyzed.

The Media Release Structure

This section is as much derived from my personal experience in the public relations (PR) and investor relations field in Mumbai, as it is based on a close textual analysis of the media releases. While the process of drafting a press release varies from company to company, and from PR agency to PR agency, the information released is generally well-planned some days (or even weeks) in advance. Of course, there are instances when companies feel the need to issue immediate ‘statements’ on charges against them, or address national/ international developments that may impact them, but in most cases (such as partnerships, new launches, expansion plans, financial results) there is some degree of discussion among senior company management, the corporate communication wing and the external PR agency in advance, resulting in some sort of a template even for the most frantic of situations. This high level of preparedness is especially true for large companies, a category Tata Motors falls into.

The elements identified through the following textual analysis may be put into better perspective, by understanding the genre or ‘normative’ structure of a media release. It should be kept in mind, however, that press releases may vary from this basic or ‘normative’ structure – for instance, they may lack a quotation from a company executive or an external ‘expert’, something which is generally recommended in crafting media releases (see Bivins, 2007; Newsom & Hayes, 2007). The implications of the media release structure extend beyond mere matters of form and content to include issues of voice, tone and topic control as well. Below, I analyze these according to three main questions: (1) Who speaks in the normative corporate media release? (2) Who is spoken to, in such instances? and finally, (3) How is it spoken?

Who Speaks? Media releases, especially in the corporate sphere, are typically written from the point of view of the organization producing it (Bivins, 2007; Newsom & Hayes, 2007). Thus, all developments are usually voiced in terms of the company engaging in some activity, or benefiting some
external party, or being recognized for some work, and so on and so forth; the organization is thus usually portrayed as an active ‘doer’. Media releases typically give the name and contact details of the person/team who issued it and who may be approached for more information on the subject. This person(s) may be attached to the corporate communication wing of the company, or may represent a company’s external PR agency, or in some cases, individuals from both may be cited. In most of the press releases examined for this study, the Head of Tata Motors’ Corporate Communications wing, one Debasis Ray, was cited as the contact person. In some instances, representatives of the company’s external PR agency, Vaishnavi Corporate Communications, were also cited as second authors. Importantly, Vaishnavi is one of the country’s largest and most successful public relations firms (see Agencyfaqs, 2005). While considering the transformation of discourse surrounding the Nano launch from the media releases to the news coverage, the strong influence of both Tata Motors and Vaishnavi thus needs to be kept in mind.

In two of the press releases studied (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008c), while Ray and Vaishnavi are both named, the information contained is attributed to an unnamed spokesperson for the organization. Another release (Tata Motors, 2008k) uses a quotation from an unnamed spokesperson, expressing the views of the organization. Using anonymous spokespersons is a common tactic employed by corporations when confirming or announcing information that is either controversial and/or has significant implications for the company. It is interesting to note that the issuance of both these releases corresponded to a time when the Singur protests had greatly intensified and the company was actively contemplating moving out.

Moreover, most corporate media releases include an ‘About Us’ slug, at the base of the release, right before the contact details of the issuer. Usually, this is no longer than a paragraph (or two at the most), extolling the unique special point of the company (for instance, “India’s largest automobile company”, Tata Motors, 2008h) or its special achievement(s), and may contain some brief financial data (revenues, for instance). One of the releases included in this study (Tata Motors, 2008j) sported an “About Tata Group” slug, in addition to the “About Tata Motors” passage: this can be attributed to the
fact that the release in question was targeted at international journalists (as well as national ones), who were not presumed to be overly familiar with the organization’s background.

Finally, the question of voice is also seen through the quotations (both direct and indirect) and views expressed in the media releases, which are active in creation of both social agents and social relations. Typically, corporate media releases employ a representative quotation from a senior-level executive (usually the Chairman, CEO or Managing Director, though in some cases, Directors of the Board who fulfill particular functions, such as those in charge of a particular division of the company that is the release’s topic, may also be included). One reason for doing this is because journalists usually want a ‘comment’ or ‘quote’ from a senior-level representative on the issue, if they are to publish the media release: it makes for good media copy. Additionally, it has the effect of publicizing the chosen spokesman; that is, it is hoped that the featured CEO or Chairman will become relatively better known in media circles (and by extension, the circles of their audiences), leading (hopefully) to a bigger share of the spotlight for the organization. Quotes from the Chairman are usually used in instances when the company is doing something new and highly touted, or even when the company is in crisis-communications mode; the quote gives the impression that the Chairman is at the helm and well-positioned to take stock of matters. Inevitably, this has the effect of valorizing the company representative, a theme that was evident in this study. In some cases, instead of featuring the company’s Chairman, quotations from prominent external parties are used: for instance, a release on a CSR award received by Tata Motors at a prominent event might feature some quotes from the Union Commerce Minister. Several of the releases included in this study (Tata Motors, 2006, 2008i, 2008j, 2008m, 2008n) use quotes from company Chairman Ratan Tata and other senior managers.

Who is Spoken to? Once a media release has been drafted by the corporate communication wing of an organization or its external PR agency, it is sent to senior-level management for approval. The draft has to be approved and the final version of the release is then sent to the stock exchanges where the company is listed (if it is a publicly listed company, as Tata Motors is) and also posted on the corporate web site. The corporate communication wing of the organization or its PR agency then distributes the
release to the media via fax, phone conversations, emails or couriered mails. The team is usually attuned to the needs and deadlines of the media: for instance, most newspapers enforce a 4 p.m. deadline for press releases to be featured in the next day’s edition (unless the news contained in the release is deemed very important/ influential by the editor). Again, since journalists are typically flooded by press releases every day, the distributing agency needs to ensure that the release sent out addresses topics and themes that the journalist is interested in (see Bender, Davenport, Drager, & Fedler, 2009). Accordingly, lists of journalists are maintained by the agency, detailing which journalist in which media channel covers ‘auto industry’ or ‘steel industry’ or ‘urban lifestyle’ and so on, and care is taken that the media release is sent to the journalist covering the relevant beat. Thus, it stands to reason that press releases pertaining to the Nano launch were initially sent to reporters tracking the ‘auto’ and general ‘corporate’ beat; a secondary target would be ‘urban affairs’ reporters who would be interested in the implications of the Nano for urban mobility.

Importantly, the intended targets of the media releases are not just journalists but those who may be reached through/ via them: potential and actual customers, employees, shareholders, and stock market analysts. The media, after all, fulfils a gatekeeper function (see Bender et al., 2009) that, while vital to the process of social construction of the agents involved and the relations between them, form a bridge to the company’s stakeholders. The investing community, in particular, is a very important stakeholder to the company. In most cases, after distributing media releases to journalists, the organization’s corporate communication wing or PR agency will then send them to analysts at various investment houses, brokerages and banks, who actively track or hold the company’s stock. The version of the release sent to investors may vary marginally from the version sent out to journalists.

The focus on urban, technology-savvy stakeholders (be they journalists, employees, customers, investors or market analysts) is also apparent in the channels of communication used by the organizational agent. Most press releases include the name and designation of the contact person, a landline telephone number, email address and the corporate web site’s URL. For select journalists and important investors/ market analysts, the agent supplies mobile phone numbers that make for quicker
contact. In the releases studied, the telephone number provided was not a personal one – it was a general office number for the corporate communication wing of the company, so that callers would first be screened by a secretary or office assistant. Personal cell phone numbers of corporate communication managers (like Debasis Ray of Tata Motors) are typically not publicized in the media releases, though this is a rule that varies according to the relative prominence of the company: a smaller company sorely in need of news coverage or investor interest often hands out cell phone numbers of its representatives and even senior managers. In the releases studied here, cell phone numbers were provided only for the external PR agency representatives, and not for the organization’s executives. In addition to the screening process regarding phone calls, the emphasis given to the web site and email addresses of corporate representatives underlines the urban bias of the company’s take on stakeholders. In some instances (Tata Motors, 2008j, 2008n), the company provides links for streaming video, emailed attachments and the like, which again highlight its urban, technocrat focus.

How is it Spoken? The mode of speaking, the rhetorical schemata employed, in corporate media releases typically take into account both the needs of the first-level target (the media), and those of the organization producing the message. Since the media ranks currency or timeliness of information as very important (Bender et al., 2009), the rhetorical schemata employed is usually in the form of an announcement detailing a new development or as a progress report on an ongoing project or as a reaction to some issue that has become prominent of late (Bivin, 2007; Newsom & Hayes, 2007). In some instances, announcements are often worded as progress reports, using phrases like “has continued to be” or “reaffirms its commitment to” and so on, even though the issue has not been referred to in previous releases by the organization. The reverse is true as well, where a progress report may seemingly address a new development, for instance, Tata Motors’ work in training programs for local women, part of its ongoing community development work, may be phrased as a ‘new’ initiative by the company in the area.

In addition to currency, the media also values prominence or the level of widespread impact generated by a story (Bender et al., 2009). Accordingly, corporate releases typically focus on implications of the corporate move in terms of its revenue structure and bottom-line, technological advancement, and
inputs from prominent personalities (be they company Chairmen or external individuals, like a high-ranking government minister). Thus, it may be argued that, by virtue of addressing perceived media values of prominence and impact, media releases inevitably highlight issues related to the neoliberal capitalist project of profit and market, and valorize organizational personalities such as CEOs and Chairmen. There is thus arguably little scope for humanist narratives of the life world to be revealed through a corporate media release, even in cases where the topic of the release may be deemed humanist, for instance, community development undertaken by the organization. In all of the releases examined for this study, examples or instances of actual persons benefitted on the ground at Singur are wholly absent – and it is only in the company-authored CSR reports (Tata Motors, 2008) that such humanist narratives are apparent. In fact, corporate media releases tend to be highly administrative in tone, bordering on the pseudo-governmental in the sense that they routinely list developments, allotments, financial investments, takeovers/ buy-outs/ mergers and other administrative and expansionist news, rarely involving humanist narratives of the life-world. In several instances, the administrative tone of the media release may be interspersed with a sharp technocrat focus, for instance when companies announce the launch of a new product or enhanced engineering process, reaffirming the strong link between technological advancement and the ‘business case’.

Adhering to journalistic style and values may also result in an inordinate number of nominalizations in corporate media releases. According to Fairclough (1992), nominalizations are textual elements that may omit the agency of a social actor, and turn “processes and activities into states and objects, and concretes into abstracts” (p. 182). Most media releases are limited to under one page (including contact details and the ‘about us’ slug), a trend supported by the releases in this study as well, owing both to the space constraints of newspapers and in the effort to package the main points of the release into something short and attractive to catch the presumably over-worked journalist’s attention (Bender et al., 2009; Bivin, 2007). It is thus inevitable that in order to create this ‘package’ (good things come in small packages; really?), certain details of the topic at hand deemed relatively unimportant are dropped, resulting in the creation of nominalizations, which construct the organization as the sole active
agent and pass over concrete details of a process rendering it quite abstract in the end. For instance, in the last media release studied here (Tata Motors, 2009), it may be surmised that the relative shortness of the passage encourages the usage of several nominalizations. These may be in describing the response to the Nano as merely “much-awaited” and with “unprecedented interest”, without going into the issues and complexities involved therein, or in terms of describing the eventual roll-out of the car in terms of “the widest possible network to book the car” and “across the length and breadth of India”, without detailing exactly from where and at how many outlets it will be available. From a perspective that values currency, conciseness and prominence, as the media is assumed to do, such nominalizations may become commonplace and in fact essential to make sure the release receives media coverage.

The normative structure of a corporate media release also enables organizations to play on their strengths and avert issues they would rather not engage with. Press releases, crafted and drafted by organizational agents, are by nature monologic. They may include viewpoints and reactions of independent, external personalities (for instance, a representative of an NGO working with the company on a CSR project, or a high-ranking government minister), but the selection and placement of these views are entirely in the hands of organizational agencies. Thus, in effect, the basic structure of the media release promotes one-sided communication, from the company to its publics, which has important implications for topic control and modality (Fairclough, 1992), reification of organizational reality (Deetz, 1992, 2005) and organized silencing of dissident voices (Clair, 1998). Media releases typically have a pre-set agenda, from which they rarely deviate even while presenting quotes from external parties, so that topic control is easily managed and alternative views opposing the organization are not featured. Since most releases have a pre-written template prepared for the occasion (for instance, a new expansion, tie-up, takeover, new product, etc.), topic control becomes institutionalized and structured.

This is not to say that media releases are painfully blunt on the rejection of views other than that of the company, however. On the contrary, since they are conceived as external communication to enhance the organization’s image in the eyes of its stakeholders, they are usually very ‘polite’ and observe interpersonal niceties (Bivin, 2007, Newsom & Hayes, 2007). For instance, the press releases
examined in this study uniformly praised the efforts of the company’s employees, vendors/partners, the State and local residents who supported the Singur project. Sometimes, corporate releases tend to ignore issues and developments that may be controversial for the company, and choose to focus instead on the organizational scheme of things. This was also evident in the case study, where Tata Motors made no mention at all in its media releases of the Singur protests, despite their increasing pace, till only a month before it officially decided to pull out from the area.

Modality signifies the affinity expressed by the organization with its stand in the topic addressed in the press release. For Fairclough (1992), it “is a point of intersection in discourse between the signification of reality and the enactment of social relations” (p. 160), and may be either objectively or subjectively expressed. By virtue of the normative media release structure, which mainly announces a new development or reaction by the company, corporate releases typically embody a high degree of modality. Referring to the media’s use of modality, Fairclough asserts that “they systematically transform into ‘facts’ what can often be no more than interpretations of complex and confusing sets of events” (pp. 160-161). This is generally true of media releases as well, which utilize the journalistic style of writing. For instance, in the last media release included in the study (Tata Motors, 2009), both objective and subjective modality are observed. The company is clear about its decision to produce the Nano commercially, and substantiates this with details on the production schedule, reiterating that it will facilitate “the widest possible network” for the car’s distribution (subjective modality). At the same time, it uses objective modality to stress on how “much-awaited” the car is, and the interest it has generated, treating as hard fact what is actually a subjective opinion. While it does cite the “creation of over 6,000 interest groups and communities”, there is no substantiation offered on who these groups are, whether they are independent of the company or not, what their goals are, and so on, resulting ultimately in the creation of a nominalization.

The normative structure of a media release also determines to a large extent the intertextuality of discourse, as highlighted by Fairclough (1992). While privileging currency and prominence, media releases habitually fall back upon past developments to provide a background or context. This is in line
with the popular ‘inverted pyramid’ style of journalistic writing, which starts out with the most timely, prominent and relevant details, but then constructs a background after the first 3-4 passages, using material that has been released earlier to the public (Bender et al., 2009). There is thus great scope for manifest intertextuality, as media releases often use material from previously distributed releases to craft this background. In the releases studied here, significant manifest intertextuality was observed among the releases and with the organization’s website. Prior information on the Nano unveiling, the company’s community development and training programs at Singur, launch of new products, the organization’s global footprint, partnerships with State agencies, and so on were liberally used – in many cases, word for word – to fill out the body of the media release. Constitutive intertextuality, or interdiscursivity, is also utilized by media releases, especially to establish the organization’s corporate reputation. The press releases examined here showed interdiscursivity regarding its stellar corporate reputation, its prior record of good CSR practices at its various facilities across India, its global links and tie-ups, and its links with the State. In the last release included in this study (Tata Motors, 2009), for instance, there was substantial manifest intertextuality with an earlier release (Tata Motors, 2008n) detailing the unveiling of the Nano, on themes emphasizing history-in-the-making and the strong populist interest in the car, while interdiscursivity between the ‘business case’ and the stakeholder models of corporate social responsibility was also apparent. Accordingly, it may be argued that the normative media release format encourages liberal usage of intertextual references, both manifest and latent, perhaps far more compared to other text-formats, such as web site data (which tend to get updated regularly with new information).

The Organization as Social Agent

The close textual analysis of the media releases revealed some interesting insight into the construction of the organization in question, Tata Motors, with which the first research question of the study is concerned. This can be examined through the various heads below. While several of these heads recall many of the indicators of the organization’s corporate reputation in the earlier section (discourse as social context/practice), it should be kept in mind that the methods for studying the social context/practice and the media releases were different.
**History, Heritage and Reputation.** The company prides itself on its rich heritage of representing one of India’s oldest and largest business groups. This is apparent in several instances in the media releases, both when it stresses on its long tradition of being active in the nation-building and community-developing spheres (Tata Motors, 2006, 2007g, 2007h, 2008c, 2008i, 2008k, 2008m), and when it cites its reputation as a socially responsible company (Tata Motors, 2007d, 2007i). It expressed grave affront once its decision to move from Singur was final, claiming that the politically motivated protests had had a “continuous affect on the reputation and integrity of the Tata Group” (Tata Motors, 2008m). Even earlier, while detailing the community development work it undertook at Singur, the organization repeatedly stressed its prior track record of good CSR, “in line with the company’s practices in other locations” (Tata Motors, 2007f, 2007i, 2008h, 2008l). For instance,

The visit of the first group of 23 Panchayat [local self-government body] leaders of the Singur area on January 17 to Tata Motors’ Jamshedpur facility and community development initiatives, their appreciation of the company and their whole-hearted welcome to the organisation is indicative of how the ineradicable emotional bond between the company and the community will be further cemented in the future, as in other locations. (Tata Motors, 2007h)

In this excerpt detailing a visit of local self-government leaders from Singur to the Jamshedpur factory, the organization highlights the “ineradicable emotional bond” it has historically enjoyed purportedly. History here is seen to be *continuous*, in that the traditions of the past lead seamlessly on to the “appreciation” in the present, and are expected to culminate in the further cementing of ties in the future.

History is also given humanist hues, in that the focus is on both the company’s material advances and “in-house progression” (Tata Motors, 2008j), *and* on the human narrative of progress: as the Chairman (Tata, 2008) of the company says in his speech at the Nano unveiling, it is “a journey that symbolizes the human spirit of change, the will to question the unquestionable, the drive to stretch the envelope”. Apart from highlighting its tradition as a socially responsible company, Tata Motors also showcases itself as venerable, in terms of its business achievements and global footprint. It is a company that often “set[s] a new benchmark” (Tata Motors, 2008j), and explores innovations that are often introduced “for the first
time in India‖ (Tata Motors, 2008e). While the “About Tata Motors” slug found in many of the press releases presents a vivid summary of the company’s achievements and global footprint, this is also emphasized in releases that detail the Nano unveiling (Tata Motors, 2008n) or the launch of new products at the New Delhi Auto Expo (Tata Motors, 2008e) and at Geneva (Tata Motors, 2008j).

Another aspect of the company’s stress on history/heritage is the idea that it is actually making history. While the “first time in India” references and the cited breakthroughs in setting new standards and technological benchmarks (Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j, 2008n) play into this aspect, it is most clearly seen in references to the Nano launch. In his speech, Ratan Tata (2008) emphasized that it was a “memorable occasion”, and hence there were “no celebrities at this function nor any dance routines” or anything else that might be considered frivolous and detract from the sobriety of the occasion. In the same speech, before launching into the design strategies that went into the Nano, he referred to several historical landmarks, suggesting that the Nano was in fact history-in-the-making:

Ladies and gentleman, I invite you to join me in this journey of innovation and evolution. The quest to lead and the quest to conquer. It is this quest that led to the first manned flight by the Wright brothers. Today, thousands of aircrafts travel the skies carrying millions of passengers across the globe in safety and comfort. The same quest for leadership and conquering new frontiers led to landing man on the moon, an unheard of and unbelievable achievement at that time.

Innovation and evolution led to the creation of a bicycle which the rider pedaled to move faster than walking. Later, innovation motorized the bicycle to create the motorcycle and the scooter, providing motorized transport for up to two persons. The ENIAC computer in 1945, considered among the highest powered at that time filled an entire room. Today, the power of that huge machine is exceeded in the personal computer that sits on our desks or in fact, that we carry as laptops in our briefcases. (Tata, 2008)

In the excerpt above, not only is “evolution” tied to the technological advancement of the company and the Nano, but references to the Wright brothers’ first flight, the moon-landing, the invention of the
bicycle, the development of computers from the ENIAC to PCs and laptops – all of these emphasize that, for Tata, the *Nano* and the company is literally *making* history. Moreover, the allusion to “conquering new frontiers” and “the quest to lead and the quest to conquer” are clear markers of the ‘war/ conflict’ metaphor considered in the textual analysis. The declaration of war, to venture into uncharted territories (or markets) is perhaps not new to either traditional capitalism or neo-capitalism (see Prahalad, 2007), but does need to be recognized in this instance, especially given how war/ conflict strategies play out subsequently in the company’s portrayal of the Singur protesters.

*Common Sense.* Stanley Deetz (1992) observes, “common sense consists of shared meanings and the implicit acceptance of concepts and activities that produce and confirm these meanings” (p. 268). To reify the organization-preferred view of reality, corporations draw on socially constructed meanings of common sense, and elevate managerial logics to the strata of common sense, so that they are harder to challenge and subvert (Deetz, 1992, 2003; McMillan, 2007; Mumby, 1988; Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002). In the present case study, Tata Motors showcases itself as an exemplar of common sense. For instance, the lack of mention of the Singur protesters in the media releases till just about a month before the company relocated its factory is projected to be a case where it “displayed immense patience and had sincerely hoped that the situation would improve” (Tata Motors, 2008m) – casting it in a most patient, almost parochial role. Its final decision to move from Singur is seen to be the result of a long and lengthy deliberative process, where “the company has assessed the prevailing situation” (Tata Motors, 2008k), but there is also an air of inevitability in the move, as if this was the *only* possible outcome for the organization: “there was no option but to move the project out of the State of West Bengal” (Tata Motors, 2008m). Yet, even before making this move, the company stresses on its planning process, its role as a thinking, intelligent entity; for instance:

> In view of the current situation, the company is evaluating alternate options for manufacturing the Nano car at other company facilities and a detailed plan to relocate the plant and machinery to an alternate site is under preparation. To minimize the impact this may have on the recently recruited
and trained people from West Bengal, the Company is exploring the possibility of absorbing them at its other plant locations. (Tata Motors, 2008k)

Accordingly, while the company emphasizes on its “detailed plan” with various “alternate options”, it also tries to show itself attuned to the needs of the local community, in thinking up ways to accommodate the loss of jobs and livelihood that would result from its decision to leave Singur.

Falling back on such indicators of common sense has the additional advantage that it shows the company’s adversaries as lacking in it: they are thus a volatile, irrational mob who do not know what is best for them (more on this later, when I discuss the organizational strategies to frame the Singur protesters). On the other hand, Tata Motors is the “common-sensical” social agent who attempts to provide the community with jobs (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007c, 2007d, 2007f, 2007i, 2007j, 2008h), economic independence (2007b, 2007h), healthcare (2007g) and good education (2008l). All of these are tangible and sound indicators of development to the urban media, who do not typically concern themselves with Pal and Dutta’s (2009) rural-humanist narratives of land, as the next section will show.

Moreover, the organization shows common sense by being the good law-abiding social agent: it asserts repeatedly that the protesters do not merely have vested interests but are also indulging in illegal acts producing “intimidation and fear” (Tata Motors, 2008k), against the law of the land, while the company has the State’s sanction and support (Tata Motors, 2006, 2007h, 2008c, 2008k, 2008m). The organization’s version of common sense thus enjoys legal and State approval, while the dissidents’ do not. As Deetz (1992) observes, “common sense is protected from critique because of its pervasiveness and the formation of institutions and practices that extend and confirm its truth… opposition to it could only be for personal gain or because of disconnection from life” (p. 269).

Interestingly, the common sense shown by the organization here is different from Deetz’s (1992) version, in that the latter argues that “the lack of a connection to historical experience, and its fragmentation further protect it from critique and make it easier to control” (p. 270). However, in the present case study, history is very much part of the picture and the organization’s common sense is not so much divorced from history as it is in fact embedded in and reinforced by it. The organization’s history,
heritage and reputation as a socially responsible corporation, as an entity long involved in both nation-building and the capitalist enterprise, affords it a great deal of clout in dictating its version of common sense. Consider the following excerpt, where references to the organization’s history and reputation work hand-in-hand with strong modality and nominalizations,

The successful candidates will then undergo 15 months’ hands-on training at Tata Motors facilities to make them multi-skilled. On successful completion of this 15-month programme, the trainees will take the trade tests to qualify for trade certificates issued by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and will become eligible for employment at the Singur plant and vendor facilities. (Tata Motors, 2008h)

Here, forceful modality (both objective and subjective) frames the training procedure as completely matter-of-fact, common-sensical and beneficial. Nominalizations like “hands-on training” (involving what?), “multi-skilled” (at what?) and “eligible for employment” (in what capacity?) are buzz-words that generate appreciation for the company’s action, but never truly explain what the end-results are. Again, while both the nominalizations and modality are effective instruments of common sense in themselves, they operate with markers of the company’s prior history/reputation: in the release, the above excerpt is sandwiched between references to the “intense training at Tata Motors’ plants in Jamshedpur and Pune” and the community development program “in line with the company’s practices in other locations”. Moreover, the inclusion at the end of the release of the “About Tata Motors” slug, which goes into more details about the company’s reputation, history and global footprint, contextualizes the organization’s common sense as very much shaped and reinforced by history/heritage.

Technological Advancement. The organization is projected as technologically advanced, capable of great feats and achievements in both the national and international arenas. This is expressed most directly through announcements on its “blitzkrieg of new products” (Tata Motors, 2008e) and engineering processes (Tata, 2008; Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j, 2008n). In line with its corporate reputation of being technologically advanced, Tata Motors (2008j) prides itself on being a “new generation” company that has gone through significant “in-house progression”, with products that “set a new benchmark” and
exceed regulatory requirements. The media releases express the organization’s technological advancement in terms of “world class” technology produced for “the first time in India”, its leadership in several key industry segments (“it created the diesel small car segment”), and joint ventures with foreign companies (Tata Motors, 2008e). The Nano, in particular, is billed as the pinnacle of technological advancement: it is “a comfortable, safe, all-weather car, high on fuel efficiency & low on emissions”, a “new benchmark among small cars” that is “a first for the global automobile industry” (Tata Motors, 2008n). Moreover, the Chairman (Tata, 2008) tends to argue that technological advancement is the cure-all panacea everyone has been waiting for:

There are solutions for most problems. The barriers and roadblocks that we face are usually of our own making and these can only be demolished by having the determination to find a solution, even contrary to the conventional wisdom that prevails around us, by breaking tradition.

The excerpt is interesting because, on the one hand, it tends to use a humanist face for technology (by using the overtly personalized “we” and “our making”) and, on the other hand, it downplays the force of history and common sense (“tradition” and “conventional wisdom”, respectively), themes by which the organization defines itself, as seen earlier. Accordingly, it is clear that in constructing itself as a social agent, the organization uses (perhaps intentionally, perhaps not) a slew of paradoxical references.

Interestingly, the media releases also show a slew of nominalizations while describing Tata Motors’ technological advancement in at least five instances. These pertain to the scientific knowhow involved (“new generation”, “maximize performance”, “lean design strategy”, “increasing operating efficiencies”, “world class standards”), the passenger concerns of comfort and safety (“comforts and convenience of family traveling”, “among the safest SUVs”, “connectivity and conveniences of a modern office”, “combined demands of space and maneuverability in our congested cities”), the rebuttal of environmentalist charges using technological advancement as an excuse (“affordable transport solution with a low carbon footprint”), while describing regulatory standards (“exceeds current regulatory requirements”, “set a new benchmark”, “meet safety requirements and emissions norms”), and/ or while
trying to link technological advances with *populist/humanist narrative* (“manoeuvre on busy roads in cities as well as in rural areas”, “new generation”, “People’s Car”).

Stanley Deetz (1992) asserts that corporations strive for a “dynamic interplay” (p. 268) between organizational common sense and scientific/technological advances. Thus, to view the company through a purely technocrat lens, asserting that its stress on technological advancement de-humanizes social reality, would be both over-simplistic and inaccurate. The media releases show several instances where technological advancement merges with humanist narratives and goals. While explicitly personal stories of affected individuals – for instance, that of Himanshu in the company’s annual CSR report (Tata Motors, 2008o) – may not be used in the releases, other tactics are used to stress the ‘human side’ of technology. This is most apparent when Chairman Rata Tata recounted his “vision” of enabling an ordinary middle-class Indian family to own a car of its own,

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony at the 9th Auto Expo in New Delhi, Mr. Ratan N. Tata said, “I observed families riding on two-wheelers – the father driving the scooter, his young kid standing in front of him, his wife seated behind him holding a little baby. It led me to wonder whether one could conceive of a safe, affordable, all-weather form of transport for such a family… Today, we indeed have a People’s Car, which is affordable and yet built to meet safety requirements and emission norms, to be fuel efficient and low on emissions. We are happy to present the People’s Car to India and we hope it brings the joy, pride and utility of owning a car to many families who need personal mobility.” (Tata Motors, 2008n)

Thus, emerging economy aspirations, the family goal of budget conservation, human ambitions of upward mobility – all of these are thus successfully wedded to the narrative of technological advancement, in a way that humanizes the neoliberal organizational project. The nominalization of “People’s Car” that the company adopts while referring to the *Nano* (and which subsequently gets popularized by the media coverage, as seen in the next section) also connects the humanist and the technocrat faces of the organization. The media releases showcasing Tata Motors’ new launches couch the organization’s technological feats in humanist concerns, such as passenger comfort and safety (“superior styling,
comfort and safety features‖, Tata Motors, 2008j) and customer needs (―specifically designed to satisfy the needs of city customers‖, Tata Motors, 2008e). Though the ‘customer is king’ mantra seems to be in line with the traditional neoliberal ‘business case’, this argument becomes problematized once put into context with the organization’s unique corporate reputation, its history/heritage, and its focus on nation- and community-building.

The Neo-Capitalist. The idea of the neo-capitalist engages directly with both technological advancement and organizational common sense (see Deetz, 1992, on “managerialism”; also see Chapter 2). The media releases showcase Tata Motors as an organizational voice loyal to shareholders and employers, but which also engages in sustainable business and community-oriented development work. Accordingly, the company’s profit-making role is focused on, by highlighting product launches (Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j, 2008n) and asserting the primacy of the “integrated auto cluster” (Tata Motors, 2008k) over the validity of community protests at Singur (which are in turn denounced as politically motivated and misguided, as seen later in this section). For instance, in its “official press statement” after suspension of construction work at the site, the company declares (through an unnamed “spokesperson”),

We will review our stated position only if we are satisfied that the viability of the project is not being impinged, the integral nature of the mother plant and our ancillary units are being maintained and all stakeholders are committed to develop a long term congenial environment for smooth operations of the plant in Singur. (Tata Motors, 2008b)

In this excerpt, the “viability of the project” is clearly above any considerations involving the also-mentioned stakeholders; moreover, the “long-term congenial environment” that is hoped for, upon deliberations with the stakeholders, is important only insofar as the “smooth operations of the plant” are allowed to take place. The use of “only” to highlight the company’s subjective modality at the start of the excerpt strengthens the primacy of the neoliberal project.

The company’s training programs and community development work are also framed in the neoliberal language of employability and sustainability. Accordingly, “appropriate and necessary people” will be employed “as per the project’s need” (Tata Motors, 2007d), also showing how nominalizations
may be used to frame the imperatives of the ‘business case’. Potential employees are referred to as “batches” in several releases (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007c, 2007f, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j, 2008h, 2008l), a term which calls to mind the assembly-line production mechanism of neoliberal capitalism:

This initiative by Tata Motors for ITI-trained Singur youth was started on December 25, 2006, when the first such batch of 21 candidates appeared for tests. From that batch, Tata Motors has already selected 11 candidates, whose training at a company facility is being finalised. (Tata Motors, 2007c)

Great stress is laid to training and testing according to industrial standards, rather than setting store by the real-world humanist experience of the rural people at Singur, who “will be given training in appropriate skills to enhance their employability” (Tata Motors, 2007i). Employment generation and economic growth are seen to be the fundamental avenues of development for the region, and (as seen earlier in this section) the media release format allows for a blinkered representation of the organizational view. Strong objective modality is employed here, for instance: “The Tata Motors’ plant operation is expected to create employment in excess of 10,000 direct and indirect jobs within the plant, amongst vendors and service providers in the vicinity” (Tata Motors, 2007h). In what also constitutes an example of manifest intertextuality, the same idea (and many of the same words) was used in earlier releases (for instance, Tata Motors, 2006), showcasing subjective modality. Manifest intertextuality is also seen in repeated mentions of the employment-enhancing aims of the organizational project, the training/testing schedule for local residents, and the kind of work they might eventually be doing. For instance,

Tata Motors recently inducted a batch of around 100 youth as apprentices at the Singur plant.

This batch comprises youth from Singur villages and from various ITIs of West Bengal. 16 local youth, educated in state-run Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) have been appointed as employees at the Singur plant from October 2007. 300 others are undergoing training. On successful completion of the training programme, the trainees will take the trade tests to qualify for trade certificates issued by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and will become eligible for apprenticeship training at the Singur plant and vendor facilities. (Tata Motors, 2008l)
This particular excerpt shows the presence of several themes identified already: partnership with State agencies, the “batch” metaphor, the emphasis on training/testing standards defined by urban industry, subjective modality to reify the benefits of the training, and nominalizations (“eligible for apprenticeship training”, but then what?) on the training’s actual benefits.

*Sustainability* is stressed by the organization, when it emphasizes the fuel-efficiency of its products (including the *Nano*), compliance with emission norms, cost-cutting mechanisms that help conserve natural resources, and sustainable development work undertaken by the company at its other facilities (Jamshedpur and Pune are repeatedly mentioned). As seen earlier (especially in the note detailing the organization’s reputation as technologically advanced), the liberal usage of nominalizations and strong modality successfully naturalizes the organization’s preferred view of things on this matter.

Even *community development* measures such as women’s training are guided by the organizational project, so that women should cook food for the company’s workers, produce uniforms and other items that will be needed by its employees, and so on (Tata Motors, 2007b). While detailing the women’s training programs, the media releases stress on the involvement of State agencies, the value of the received training certification, and the fact that its ultimate goal is to “infuse income generation for the families, by enabling them to provide various items and services which will be required during the construction phase and when the Tata Motors and vendor plants are operational” (Tata Motors, 2007b, 2007g, 2007h). Another passage, repeated in several releases, ties employment/training for the organizational project more directly with the company’s CSR work, even as it defines what the company’s CSR program entails;

The [community development] programme includes: a) training, according to an individual’s educational qualifications and skill, to improve their employability and also create opportunities for self employment; b) training women for employability – through facilitation of cooperative societies – to produce a diverse range of items, which could be used in the Tata Motors plant or the vendor plants; and c) social development in the Singur area, through community centres, and
support for primary health, primary/secondary education and adult education. (Tata Motors, 2007f, 2007i, 2008h, 2008l)

Except for the last bit on “social development”, the other pillars of this program are clearly linked to enhancing “employability”. Even healthcare is tied to this cause in later releases; for instance, a release (Tata Motors, 2007g) states, “The health initiative is part of Tata Motors’ comprehensive community development and welfare programme for Singur, which also focuses on employability-oriented training, and women’s employability.”

The neo-capitalist organization also encompasses a balance between valorizing a specific company-personality and focusing on the participatory framework in its production work and CSR activities. Traditional capitalism brooks an ‘every man for himself’ motto, where individual leaders are lionized for their strong and charismatic leadership skills, their potential to transform the production process for the better, and to lead the company into new territories and out of any tight spots it may encounter (see Conger, 1989; Graham, 1991; Yukl, 1999). In the media releases examined, there were several instances where the Tata Motors Chairman is valorized, his personal leadership is praised, and he is feted as a visionary of sorts for sticking doggedly with his “dream” of the Nano, the “People’s Car”. A passage from his speech at the Nano unveiling, which finds itself faithfully reproduced in the media release (Tata Motors, 2008n) issued the same day, states,

Today's story started some years ago when I observed families riding on two wheelers, the father driving a scooter, his young kid standing in front of him, his wife sitting behind him holding a baby and I asked myself whether one could conceive of a safe, affordable, all weather form of transport for such a family. A vehicle that could be affordable and low cost enough to be within everyone's reach, a people's car … This then was the dream we set ourselves to achieve. Many said this dream could not be achieved. Some scuffed at what we would produce, perhaps a vehicle comprising two scooters attached together or perhaps an unsafe rudimentary vehicle, a poor excuse for a car. (Tata, 2008)
The man’s role as visionary and dogged concern for the common man is emphasized in the excerpt above, together with his decision to push with the *Nano* idea. His phrase “that is because a promise is a promise” at the unveiling was also prominently featured by the news coverage (as will be seen in the next section), showcasing both his visionary status and enabling him to deliver on the aspirations of the so-called common man, expressing solidarity with him. It also recalls Boltanski and Chiapello’s (1999) “connectionist” capitalist leader, who strives for the common good. From a textual point of view, the infusion of such humanist elements makes for strong subjective modality.

Ratan Tata is also credited with *embodying the non-partisan and apolitical stance* of the organization. In response to the Singur protests; he professes “great regret” and “extreme anguish” at having to abandon the site, since it was his apparent ambition to revitalize the local economy (Tata Motors, 2008m). Again, in both the releases first announcing the project in West Bengal (Tata Motors, 2006) and Gujarat (Tata Motors, 20088i), his is the voice that represents the company.

Speaking at the announcement, the Chairman of Tata Motors, Mr. Ratan N. Tata, said, “This investment is a reflection of the confidence that the Tata Group has in the investment climate and the Government of West Bengal. We look forward to the opportunity of revitalising the automotive industry in the state.” (Tata Motors, 2006)

While the underlying theme of Organization-State partnership and nation-building in this excerpt will be examined later on in this section, for now, it suffices to see that the human face projected by the organization is largely that of its Chairman, Ratan Tata. As suggested earlier, the normative media release structure also facilitates the valorization of individuals in the organization, through the usage of direct and indirect quotations attributed to particular personalities.

However, the neo-capitalist organization also promotes a view of the *team effort*, and the participatory ethic to which it supposedly ascribes to. Thus, even while described as “one man’s dream” (Tata, 2008), the *Nano* is seen to be the work of the entire engineering team at the company; the company gives due recognition to “Tata Motors’ engineers and designers [who] gave their all for about four years
to realise this goal” (Tata Motors, 2008n). In a clear usage of the ‘us-versus-them’ strategy to reinforce team cohesion, Ratan Tata (2008) says, at the unveiling ceremony,

Despite what the critics said, despite what our antagonistic did, we pursued our vision to give India an affordable people's car that had not been produced anywhere in the world. In fact, a car that most people said could not be manufactured for that kind of price. But we never took our eyes of our goal. Today we will present what a young group of engineers and designers gave their all, for about four years to achieve.

In this excerpt, not only are critics and antagonists equated in a way that immediately Others dissidents to the Nano as people with vested interests against the company, rather than legitimate complaints, but the themes of technological advancement, history-in-the-making and neo-capitalist team all work together admirably to frame the organization as an innovative and socially responsible agent. Moreover, all three metaphors identified earlier – ‘marketization’ (‘affordable’), ‘building’ (‘manufactured’) and ‘war/conflict’ (‘antagonistic’) – are at play here, complementing each other.

This participatory ethic was espoused not only in the organization’s normal business operations, but also in its CSR activities (at Singur and elsewhere). There are several mentions of how the company regards community development to be a participatory process (certainly, the annual CSR report, the Global Compact progress report and the Towards Sustainability report emphasize this ethic), in terms of inviting community members to visit its other facilities (Tata Motors, 2007d, 2007h), holding education/training sessions for local women (Tata Motors, 2007b), health camps (Tata Motors, 2007g) and primary education (Tata Motors, 2008l) for the local community. The community’s “enthusiastic participation” (Tata Motors, 2007b) to the company’s CSR work is also reported in one of the press releases. In the first stages of its engagement with the protesters, the company used language reminiscent of a more dialogic process, calling for a discussion among “all stakeholders”, and hoping for “a congenial environment” at Singur (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008c). However, as will be posited later on in this section, the circumstances seem to belie the rhetoric and these instances were arguably tactics used by the corporation to rarefy its preferred view of things, ignoring the fundamental reasons behind the Singur protests.
Moreover, participation in CSR work is subverted by the primacy afforded to the organizational project, and must both be “employability-oriented” (Tata Motors, 2007g) as well as “conducive to the long-term sustained operations of an industrial enterprise” (Tata Motors, 2008c). Development is gauged in terms of employability, not participation.

The media releases focus on the combination of creative energies not just within the company, but also at the inter-organizational level, and Tata Motors repeatedly stresses its partnership with its subsidiaries/ vendors/ ancillary firms. For instance, while detailing the amount of work completed at Singur, the organization (Tata Motors, 2008k) takes care to mention that,

As part of the proposed integrated auto cluster in Singur, about 60 key auto ancillary suppliers to the Nano have taken possession of land in the integrated complex and have invested about Rs.500 crores towards construction of their plants and procurement of their equipment and machinery.

This is important for both presenting the investment information to interested shareholders/ investors, as well as for stressing that the company is not the only one with a stake in the project. The “About Tata Motors” slug, found in some of the press releases, stressed the company’s links and partners; organizational partnerships were highlighted in the releases for the New Delhi (Tata Motors, 2008e) and Geneva (Tata Motors, 2008j) motor shows; and the company frequently cited the worries and concerns of its vendors due to the Singur protests (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008k, 2008m). It is through this combined effort that the benefits of industrial progress (that is, jobs) will be made available to Singur locals. In other words, a rhetorical reliance on inter-organizational linkages and partnerships becomes crucial since the entire neoliberal thesis of development and growth from the capitalist project works on the principle of trickle-down and “cascading impact” (Tata Motors, 2008i) through these linkages (see Melkote & Steeves, 2001, on neoliberal modernization development).

Interestingly, while the vendors and ancillary partners of the organization enjoy repeated mention in the media releases, they are never accorded a voice of their own, are mostly represented as passive bystanders who are hurt by the actions of the protesters, and are represented as following Tata Motors’ lead on re-location or suspension of work. For instance, “The project’s auto ancillary partners, who had
commenced work at their respective plants in Singur, were also constrained to suspend work in line with Tata Motors’ decision” (Tata Motors, 2008k, italics added). There is little room for dissent (at least in so far as the company-authored media release is concerned) – and perhaps this is natural, given the corporate reputation and size of Tata Motors. Predictably, the inter-organizational linkages mean that when Tata Motors relocated to Gujarat from West Bengal, all the vendors and ancillary units followed suit (Tata Motors, 2008i).

**The (Active) Benefactor.** The role of the neo-capitalist portends the idea of the organization as an (active) benefactor, as far as its CSR activities are concerned. However, the case study at hand shows differences with traditionally understood neo-capitalism. On the one hand, a top-down dole of resources goes against the grain of the ‘business case’, where corporate social responsibility is more in terms of improved and sustainable engineering processes and products (see Chapter 2), rather than the establishment of schools and healthcare. From a purely Gandhian viewpoint as well, charity and philanthropy are no substitutes for good trusteeship (as seen in Chapter 3). Yet, research indicates that several Indian corporations adhere to an ethical-philanthropic model of corporate social responsibility, which they perceive as faithful to the Gandhian tradition (Kumar et al., 2001). This also blends with the statist idea of partnering with State agencies to provide resources and opportunities to the less privileged (see Chapter 3). Thus the role of the company as benefactor is problematic, in that it subverts and appropriates several models of corporate responsibility, while retaining the role of active agent for the company. With the corporation as the sole active agent in the system, all other stakeholders, be they employees, customers, investors or local community members, are portrayed as passive (Frynas, 2005).

In the media releases, Singur residents are often shown to be passive recipients of development aid from the company, in line with the traditional modernization idea of development (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). The very first release examined (Tata Motors, 2006) adopts a highly administrative, almost pseudo-governmental, tone as the organization announces the details of the new factory and the impact it will have on the community: “The plant will initially directly employ 2,000 persons, and is expected to create employment in excess of 10,000 jobs amongst the vendors and service providers in the
vicinity of the plant.” This frame of the organization as benefactor continues even when Tata Motors relocates to Gujarat, following the protests at Singur; the company again says it will create 10,000 new jobs in the state, “which will have a cascading impact on the state’s economy” (Tata Motors, 2008i). The organization also plays the benefactor, on training/testing programs for local residents, women’s training sessions for the community, mobile healthcare units, and so on. In a release detailing the selection of potential employees from Singur, the organization (Tata Motors, 2007j) says,

The 17 trainees will be placed at the company’s Jamshedpur facility soon for their training. During the 6-month period, they will cover various disciplines related to their trades. Tata Motors will provide them with hostel facilities and also pay a monthly stipend during the 6-month period. On successful completion of the training programme, they will be eligible for employment in the Small Car project in Singur.

The trainees thus “will be placed” in a beneficial situation, they will be provided with various facilities and stipends, and upon the completion of their training, it is again the organization that decides on what to do with them, rather than potentially allowing them to make up their own mind about where they want to seek employment.

While terms like ‘participation’ and ‘community’ are sometimes bandied about in the media releases (as seen earlier), the overwhelming impression is that of active donor (the organization) helping a passive recipient (the community), with very little two-way communication between them. While, in some cases, the community members have come forth with funds, this role is downplayed in favor of the Organization-State partnership, and the role of the organization as benefactor. For example, while describing the self-help group formed by some local women at Singur, the release (Tata Motors, 2007b) proclaims,

The West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC), the Hooghly District Central Cooperative Bank (Singur branch), the Hooghly district administration and Tata Motors are providing financial and operational support to the women, who themselves also have invested
funds in the canteen. The 25 members of the group had received training under the auspices of the WBIDC at the Institute of Catering Technology and Hotel Management in Kolkata.

In this example, even though it is recorded that the women invested their own funds in the venture, the journalistic style of framing the passage focuses on the prominent institutions involved – the State agencies and the organization – rather than the obscure (rural) individuals.

Accordingly, the normative structure of the media release plays an important part in such a representation: given that the primary target for such releases (that is, the media) is perceived to most favor prominence and impact (Bender et al., 2009), it would be ‘common sense’ to feature the prominent organization and its impact on society, rather than life-world narratives from individual community-members, who are not famous and thus judged not ‘news-worthy’ in the conventional sense. Regardless of the part played by the textual structure, however, the organization must be held responsible in its own right for the portrayal of its stakeholders (and itself) in such a light, especially since this was also seen in the company’s web site and official documents (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008o).

_Apolitical Victim._ The ‘business case’ of corporate social responsibility sees the organization as an apolitical actor, uninvolved with issues of social change, which are arguably within the purview of political agents like the State (Blowfield, 2005; Livesey, 2002; also see Chapter 2). In the Indian context, the assertion of statist CSR and Gandhian ideals have muddied the waters sufficiently, so that the organization promotes the view of itself as apolitical, but also aligns with nation-building (see Chapter 3). True to the ‘business case’, Tata Motors (2008b, 2008c, 2008k, 2008m) portrays itself as firmly rooted in the business sphere, not involved with the state- or national level political machinery, and uses this as an excuse to counter the protests at Singur. While denouncing the protests at Singur as politically motivated and with vested interests, the organization (Tata Motors, 2008m) projects itself to be on a ‘higher’ plane than politicians and their ilk. This is significant, given the relatively low opinion that politicians and State officials are generally held in among Indian citizens (see Kumar et al., 2001). Interestingly, in a twist to this portrayal of the company as ‘apolitical’ are its very significant ties with the State, especially with regard to acquiring the land at Singur (Tata Motors, 2006, 2007e, 2007h) and organizing training.
programs for potential employees among the locals (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007f, 2007i, 2007j, 2008h). This then begs the question: if the company seeks to show itself as apolitical, then how does it explain its close partnership with the State (in both West Bengal and Gujarat) for the Nano? Does this suggest that the State is not meant to be seen as a part of the political machinery, but as somehow beyond it? While these questions have important implications for future research, they are beyond the jurisdiction of the present study and must be left unanswered for now.

Importantly, the defense of the organization as ‘apolitical victim’ to the vested interests of Machiavellian politicians compromises in part its carefully honed image as an active agent. In portraying itself as the victim, the organization (Tata Motors, 2008k) necessarily shows itself as passive and unable to respond effectively to the attacks against it, so that it is forced to relocate from Singur (Tata Motors, 2008m). This is the only instance in the entire set of media releases where the organization becomes a passive reactionary, rather than an active agent, and perhaps reflects the traditional ‘business case’ fear of the State and politics. In any case, this depiction is also strategic, in the sense that it allows the organization to fall back on its ‘common sense’ option to remove itself from controversy, rather than engage directly with the issues raised by the dissidents. The strategies of the organization when dealing with the Singur protesters are examined in greater detail later in this section.

Before examining the Organization-State linkage next, it would also be helpful to locate the construction of Tata Motors as a social agent in the continuum of organizational strategies outlined by Clair (1998) and Deetz (1992, 2005) typically used to silence dissidence. The characteristics of the organization as social agent that have emerged from the study reify the social/organizational construction of reality. Deetz (1992) argues that organizations naturalize the preferred view of reality by obscuring its socio-historical antecedents and power connotations. Using the guise of common sense, technological advancement, the benefactor and the apolitical victim, Tata Motors is able to do exactly this – it presents itself in a post-political light that cast its actions/intentions as blameless. In other words, it then becomes folly to argue with common sense; technology is the panacea for all man’s troubles; it is impossible to think badly of a charitable entity which helps others; the organization is itself the victim of circumstances
and hounded by political pundits. These are some of the basic defenses that crop up, owing to the organization’s construction of itself through its media releases. Also, by using history as the higher-order experience to legitimize the organizational position (Clair, 1998, Deetz, 1992), the case study problematizes Deetz’s assertion that naturalization progresses through the blurring of socio-historical roots. In this situation, the organization’s socio-historical roots play a huge role in strengthening the company’s reputation and granting it a privileged position to speak from. Moreover, it’s role as a neocapitalist avoids/ dismisses the discussion of certain topics, such as the responsibility for social change, the fact that its decisions may not be all that participatory, or even that the organization should be involved in direct negotiations with political entities – this is in line with Clair (1998) and Deetz’s (1992) observations of the avoidance/ discouragement of participatory discussion by organizations. The neocapitalist identity, organizational common sense, stress on technological advancement, and being a good benefactor, all help the organization to universalize sectional interests (Deetz, 2005) to a larger body. Below, I will show how the organization focuses on the interests of the industrial enterprise, its investors, shareholders and the financial media, and universalizes them as all-consuming ‘nation-building’ – tending to ignore and/ or subsume the humanist narratives of the local rural community at Singur.

The Organization, the State and Nation-Building via Corporate Development

The construction of the organization as a social agent and the Organization-State relation crafts corporate development in terms of nation-building, which is the subject of the second research question. This especially draws on the metaphors of ‘marketization’ and ‘building’ (referred to in Chapter 4). The metaphor of ‘marketization’ uses references to unfettered trade, market principles, and the primacy of profit, labor and employability. Regarding local residents as potential employees, stressing on training programs and “batches”, and treating community development as the backbone to enhancing employability are some of the ways in which the media releases ‘marketize’ the life-world of the Singur community. ‘Marketization’ is also apparent in the launch of new products, expansion of the company into new markets, ties with vendors/ ancillary firms, and focus on technological advancement. The second metaphor of relevance here is that of ‘building’, which encompasses both the neoliberal logics of building
capital and an employee base, and the participatory ideals of community-building. ‘Building’ thus stands for the relatively straight-forward construction of the car factory as well as the enhancement of community by introducing healthcare programs, better education and so on. Even employment generation, once shorn of its “batch” status, may be considered a vital tool for building community. By virtue of the company’s history/heritage, its corporate reputation and its avowed goals of national progress, the ‘building’ metaphor also includes the long-term goal of nation-building. This is most clearly seen when the organization pledges to revitalize the State, acknowledges the emerging economy aspirations of the nation’s citizens, reiterates its goal of providing upward mobility for thousands of urban/rural people, and partners with various State agencies. Accordingly, ‘marketization’ and ‘building’ are two sides of the same coin, when analyzing the construction of the Organization-State relation and the depiction of corporate development as nation-building. Consider four important aspects.

The Organization-State Link. The relation between the organization and the State needs to be considered in light of the socio-historical context. In the first place, the role of the organization as vehicle for economic growth – and thereby, development – becomes crucial to its link with the State. For instance, when the Nano project was first announced from West Bengal, a direct link was drawn between the revitalization of the state’s economy/industry and the organizational project (Tata Motors, 2006). Even later, when the company mulled over whether or not to relocate from the state, it reiterated, “Tata Motors decided to set up its Nano plant at Singur to play an active role in the re-industrialization of the State of West Bengal and make a contribution to the economic development of the region, providing direct and indirect employment opportunities and participating in the overall community development” (Tata Motors, 2008c). The inter-organizational linkages between the company and its vendors, partners and ancillary firms are also vital to the trickle-down economic growth envisioned (Tata Motors, 2006, 2008i, 2008m). Accordingly, in generating economic growth, the organization becomes an important partner for the State. The two become intertwined and conjoint: the State acquires the land for the organizational project (Thakurta, 2006), while the company expresses faith and support for the State’s policies (Tata Motors, 2006, 2008c, 2008m). The State expresses its approval for the community
development and other CSR work that the organization takes on (for instance, in the attendance of several State officials at the launch of the women’s self help group or primary education upgrades; see Tata Motors, 2007b, 2008l), while the organization in turn utilizes the State agencies for training its potential employees (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007c, 2007f, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j, 2008f). This partnership is apparent in both West Bengal and Gujarat, where Tata Motors subsequently relocates its Nano project: the organization again expresses its faith and support for the state government’s concessions to the project, while asserting that it will spearhead enormous economic growth and development for the people living there (Tata Motors, 2008i).

Importantly, the organization tends to equate the State with the people of the region (Tata Motors, 2006, 2007h, 2008c, 2008k, 2008i, 2008m). It becomes least problematic for the company to align its organizational project with nation-building ideals, when the State is deemed to accurately represent the needs and aspirations of the community. Once a mismatch is perceived to exist, in that the community vocally and aggressively rejects the mandate of the State as its own, it becomes that much harder for the organization (as well as the State) to bill the corporate agenda as a national or people-oriented one. This is best summed up in a statement released by one of the political parties forming the coalition government in the state, after resistance to the Nano became apparent in Singur: “This is people's verdict and it's the state government's duty to respect it. The government should ensure that people are not made to suffer for the factory” (TOI, 2008b).

Accordingly, the later media releases imply a straining of relations between the West Bengal State and the organization, as attempts to quell the on-site protests were fruitless, and the Nano, far from being the “People’s Car”, was in jeopardy of being dubbed in fact anti-people (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008k). When the organization finally decided to relocate from the state, it again tried to draw an unproblematic link between the State and the community: it reaffirmed its “faith in the State Government’s policies” and shared its hope that “West Bengal [the region and the community] would grow and share in the prosperity and growth of India” (Tata Motors, 2008m).
For the greater part of the Singur protests, the organization was content to let the State negotiate with the protesters, preferring to maintain an apolitical image for itself (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008c). However, by sticking to such a stand, it allowed for the entry of political parties opposed to the governing coalition. In other words, while the organization (Tata Motors, 2008m) ended up complaining about politically motivated protests, it may have been able to avoid such vested interests from creeping in (if it may be conceded that they did), had it not avowedly claimed to be the ‘apolitical victim’ and remained uninvolved in the land acquisition talks.

**Apolitical Growth.** Despite its close links with the State, the organization projects its main interests to be economic growth, the enhancement of employability, and the welfare of its stakeholders/partners. These interests go beyond the political boundaries of the State, and this goal of ‘apolitical growth’ that the company pursues stems from its own construction as an apolitical entity, divorced from the political machinery. The components of this apolitical growth are stressed in turn.

First, by way of economic growth, the company projects a “cascading impact” (Tata Motors, 2008i) called into being by inter-organizational linkages with its vendors and partners. Growth in this sense translates into (re)industrialization of the state, higher spending power of its citizens, and accommodation for rural residents in the fast-moving urban-centered economy (Tata Motors, 2006, 2007h, 2008c, 2008i, 2008m). Using objective modality, the media releases detail the economic growth expected to result from the car factory, the benefits of the employee training program, and the history-in-the making interest in the Nano. Nominalizations are also used liberally, to express the process of economic growth, the end-result of training and CSR work, the technological advancement of the Nano, and so on. Economic growth is thus taken to be an undisputed boon, virtually guaranteed by the coming of the car factory to Singur (and in Gujarat too, for that matter). It is defended against opposition at all costs, for instance, when Ratan Tata sidesteps the allegation that the Nano will worsen the congestion in urban India;

There is no doubt that India is woefully behind its neighbours in infrastructure. The government is endeavoring to address this situation with its new road policy. Looking ahead, five years from
today, were we to produce and sell 5,00,000 small cars every year, we would then, at the end of five years constitute approximately 2.5% of all passenger vehicles in the country. This could hardly be considered the nightmare of congestion that is being raised today about our new small car. (Tata, 2008)

On the one hand, the issue is conveniently transferred to the shoulders of the State, with the organization asserting that it is the State’s responsibility (and not its own) to enhance infrastructure. On the other hand, he never really answers the question, using a vague nominalization (“hardly be considered the nightmare of congestion”) and strong subjective modality to side-step the issue.

Second, there is the component of employability. This forms a core area of the company’s CSR goals, and from very early on, the media releases stress how important it is for local residents to sign up for the training programs and take advantage of the opportunities offered by Tata Motors (in partnership with the State), so that their “employability” may be enhanced (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007c, 2007d, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j). The notion of employability is also a nominalization, because the releases never specify exactly what the organization means by this (in one of the releases, there is a bit more clarification on the areas of job training for the potential employees, such as “Machines, Electrical, Electronics and Tool & Die Making”, but there is little explanation beyond this; see Tata Motors, 2007f). When considered in light of Pal and Dutta’s (2009) study of alternative humanist narratives of resistance, it is interesting that the media releases never deal with (never even mention the word) ‘livelihood’, which sees urban and rural modes of work on a level footing, and are instead preoccupied solely with ‘employment’, which has decidedly urban industrial overtones. As part of their training program, local residents are uprooted from their rural settings and sent to State agency-manned training centers or the company’s factories near/ in urban townships. Employability as a concept also goes well with the idea of “batches”, and indeed with the whole ‘marketization’ of labor. Thus, while considering what employability means here for Tata Motors, the notion of ‘building’ an employee base (in “batches”) cannot be discounted.

The final component of apolitical growth is the welfare of organizational stakeholders. First, there are the potential and actual customers of the company’s products, towards whom it is extremely mindful
in terms of comfort, safety, convenience and mobility (Tata, 2008; Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j, 2008n). Then, there are the vendors, partners and ancillary firms who will form the larger cluster around the Nano plant – and the media releases repeatedly stress how important the well-being and safety of their representatives are (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008k, 2008m). Third, there are the employees (both current and potential) of the company, whose safety has been cited as one of the main reasons for the company’s pull-out from Singur (Tata Motors, 2008k, 2008m). Moreover, sources other than the media releases (Tata Motors, n.d.a., 2007k, 2008a, 2008d, 2008o) indicate that the organization embraces a strong ethic of employee welfare and emphasizes safe working conditions. Finally, there is the local community at Singur, who would arguably be the most impacted by the car factory. The organizational response to this group of stakeholders is studied in more detail subsequently. But already, from the preceding analysis, it is apparent that the company utilized an authoritative, administrative and top-down approach to community development and employability-enhancing measures for the local community – at least in so far as the construction of social relations via the media releases is concerned. A final group of stakeholders is the investing community of shareholders; though this group has never been explicitly addressed in the media releases, ostensibly meant for the press as they are, the social context/practice of distributing corporate releases suggests that investors and shareholders are one of their key targets. In particular instances, when the company details financial investments, date(s) of launching the car, the capacity of the plant, and the revenue details of the company (Tata Motors, 2006, 2007e, 2008b, 2008e, 2008g, 2008i, 2008j, 2008m, 2008n, 2009), it might be reasonably assumed that investors are at least the secondary, if not one of the primary, targets for the releases. Taking into consideration all the various stakeholders addressed, a strong argument for the neoliberal ‘business case’ of corporate responsibility emerges, giving primacy to investors/shareholders, customers, vendors/partners and employees, while impacted communities like the one at Singur are at the receiving end of top-down communication.

*Delivering on Aspirations.* The organization sees itself as delivering on the ambitions of an emerging class of Indians, who are all too familiar with global trends and the country’s increasing economic clout, and accordingly aspire for something more, greater, higher, better…! This issue was
addressed boldly in the company’s Annual Report (Tata Motors, 2008d), in terms of growth drivers for the organization, and is most aptly summed up by one line in Ratan Tata’s speech at the Nano unveiling: “I just want to say that that [the launch of the Nano] is because a promise is a promise and that’s what we would like to leave you with.” The idea of the Nano embodying the company’s “promise” to the common Indian man is reiterated again and again, starting from the very first passage in the release announcing the unveiling:

Mr. Ratan N. Tata, Chairman of the Tata Group and Tata Motors, today unveiled the Tata ‘NANO’, the People’s Car from Tata Motors that India and the world have been looking forward to. A development, which signifies a first for the global automobile industry, the People’s Car brings the comfort and safety of a car within the reach of thousands of families. The People’s Car will be launched in India later in 2008. (Tata Motors, 2008n, emphasis in original)

It is a very powerful idea, framing the car in populist narrative as the cure-all for “the global automobile industry”, where the aim is to “brings the comfort and safety of a car within the reach of thousands of families”. The company shows a clear acumen of the nascent aspirations of its potential customers, and successfully taps into this. But while the idea of ‘delivering on aspirations’ is perhaps most clearly seen with the Nano, it is used by the organization in almost all its new launches. For instance, reflecting the idea of enhanced expectations, the Indica was re-launched as “the new generation” (Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j) car; the Tata Winger Executive was said to combine “cutting-edge design and the connectivity and conveniences of a modern office…making for a plush and up-to-the-minute mobile office for up to 4 people” (Tata Motors, 2008e); and the Indigo CS was positioned as “the first car for young professionals… a complete package to address the combined demands of space and manoeuvrability in our congested cities” (Tata Motors, 2008e). Thus, the organization positions itself as attuned to customer needs and aspirations, and delivers products and services accordingly.

Delivering on aspirations is also a powerful tool to express solidarity with the stakeholders of the organization. Earlier, I examined how the company projects Ratan Tata as its human face, and how the rhetoric of Tata’s “vision” for the Nano as tool for the Indian common man greatly enhances both his
personal valorization and that of the car in question. At the same time, the organization also stresses on the team effort at Tata Motors. When seen through the lens of ‘delivering on aspirations’, it becomes clear that the aspirations sought to be delivered on are not just customers’, but also the Chairman’s and his team’s; accordingly, this acts to cement the ties between the organization and its customers in a very powerful, humanist bind. Consider the following excerpt,

"Today we will present what a young group of engineers and designers gave their all, for about four years to achieve… This has been referred to as one man’s dream and indeed it was. But it took a tremendous amount of team work to convert this or translate this into reality. And I think it would be but fair and fitting to recognize and acknowledge the achievement of the young group of engineers who undertook the challenge for four years and great sacrifice to themselves and produced this car… There are close to five hundred people in the team and obviously not all of them can be here, so on behalf of all of us we would like to acknowledge, on behalf of the company, what the team has been able to do. All five hundred of them. (Tata, 2008)"

Here, the Nano is seen to be the embodiment of the entire Tata team’s aspirations – great care is taken to emphasize the large number of people involved, and their contribution to delivering on the aspiration. Ratan Tata still gets top billing, with the “one man’s dream” mention, but the work and the “sacrifice” of the others is also acknowledged. Importantly, the Tata team has been repeatedly described as “young” – and adjective which plays into the idea of “new generation”, and has significant connotations for expectations/ aspirations.

The organization’s role as (active) benefactor also affects its delivering on the aspirations of the local residents at Singur. This was seen earlier, with the company providing the residents “training in appropriate skills to enhance their employability” (Tata Motors, 2007j), and to enhance their “quality of life” (Tata Motors, 2008m). The following excerpt shows how the organization’s role as benefactor and the (perceived) nascent aspirations of the Singur youth feed off each other.

"Meanwhile, Tata Motors is initiating various steps to train people of the Singur villages, who had earlier registered with the WBIDC, to improve their employability. It has already selected a batch"
of individuals, on the basis of a test and interview, for an extensive 6-month training…

Arrangements will also be made to impart relevant training to other individuals, in the WBIDC list, appropriate to their educational background and skills and based on a selection process. (Tata Motors, 2007h)

While it is quite likely that there were several locals interested in the company’s training and employment options, the media releases completely ignore – and thus Other – any alternative views, essentially universalizing the interests of this segment (Deetz, 2005). It is also interesting to note that, as in the earlier mentions of the “young” Tata team, the organization argues that its project would have “created jobs for the younger citizens of the State” (Tata Motors, 2008m), directly linking youth and aspirations.

There is also a more collective sense of aspirations involved, that of the State and its citizens to be industrially advanced and ‘revitalized’, so to speak. The socio-political history of the state of West Bengal becomes important, while considering the nuances of these state-level aspirations voiced by the media releases. For instance, when the organization hopes “to play an active role in the re-industrialization of the State of West Bengal and make a contribution to the economic development of the region” (Tata Motors, 2008c) or succeed in “revitalising the automotive industry in the state” (Tata Motors, 2006), one needs to consider the compulsions of the State in entering into such a close partnership with the organization. West Bengal’s history as a past industrial powerhouse, which then saw an efflux of business houses resulting in a largely agrarian state economy, must be taken into account.

Thus, the media releases, meant for an overwhelmingly urban audience, highlight the various training, testing and employment programs for rural residents, treating as objective and undeniable fact that even they share the economic/ industrial aspirations of the State and its urban citizens. In a sense, from the urban perspective of the media releases, it is the reinforcement of such aspirations that makes the rural community true and loyal citizens: their supposedly shared vision of corporate development as economic growth as national progress. Again, when the media releases later turn their ire towards the Singur protesters, the dissidents are first projected as misled in that they do not share these aspirations (Tata
Motors, 2008b, 2008c, 2008k), and then as politically motivated against the organization and the aspirations sought to be delivered (Tata Motors, 2008m).

National Progress through Global Footprint. Aspirations also involve global issues, especially for the intended urban audience of the media releases. When the organization announced its relocation, it expressed hope “that West Bengal would grow and share in the prosperity and growth of India” (Tata Motors, 2008m). In a vein that ties with the history-in-the making idea explored earlier, the Nano is portrayed as something “that India and the world have been looking forward to. A development, which signifies a first for the global automobile industry” (Tata Motors, 2008n). When the car was launched at the Geneva Motor Show, Ratan Tata linked the company’s history/heritage both with its technological advancement and the idea of national progress through the years.

Speaking on the occasion at the Geneva Motor Show, Mr. Ratan N. Tata, Chairman of the Tata Group and Tata Motors said, “1998, when we displayed the Indica at Geneva, marked our entry into passenger cars. The last decade has been a period of significant development in Tata Motors’ capabilities. The display of the Nano, which is a first for the global automobile industry, and the new generation Indica signifies this in-house progression.” (Tata Motors, 2008j)

Accordingly, there has been a journey, he says, between the Indica and the Nano, representing “significant development” for both the organization and the global automobile industry. The “in-house progression” that he cites in the excerpt could just as well refer to the economic growth of the country from the 1990s, when liberalization/globalization got underway in India (see Chapter 3), till present times, with India one of the 20 most industrialized nations in the world.

Tata Motors’ global footprint is framed in the media releases through both collaborative and antagonistic frames. On the one hand, the company stresses its various international partners and subsidiaries, which are vital to its corporate development. Global markets and customers are seen to provide a new wave in the company’s fortunes, and its press releases extol its world class standards and access to world markets. The media release on the company’s Geneva Motor Show exhibit (Tata Motors, 2008j) clearly targets the attendant international press (and, through them, foreign investors), highlighting
issues such as: the Tata growth story in the global markets, the company’s unique advantages and products, its existing and planned international ventures/partnerships, and listings on the New York Stock Exchange and other international exchanges. While describing one of its new launches, the global partnerships involved in crafting the product are emphasized:

While continuing to be manufactured in India, the Xenon will also be manufactured in Thailand and will be marketed in Tata’s existing European, Asean and African markets… The Tata range has been selling in select European markets since 1993 and has continued to gain increasing response year after year. (Tata Motors, 2008j)

The same release also includes a brief slug labeled “About Tata Group”, at the end, meant for international journalists who might not be as familiar with the Tata brand as the Indian press. The slug showcases the group’s preeminence in the Indian business scene (“3.2 per cent of the country's GDP”); it also tries to emphasize the importance of exports and global markets to the group’s revenues (“38% of the total Group revenues”), together with the vast number of people employed worldwide by its subsidiaries, projecting it as a true multi-national corporation rather than ‘just’ an Indian corporation.

The Tata Group is one of India's largest and most respected business conglomerates, with revenues in 2006-07 of $28.8 billion, the equivalent of about 3.2 per cent of the country's GDP, and the international revenues of the Group in 2006-07 were US$ 10.8 billion, contributing to 38% of the total Group revenues. Tata companies together employ over 300,000 people. (Tata Motors, 2008j)

At the same time, the reference to the group’s reputation (“one of India's largest and most respected business conglomerates“) tries to show it as an established enterprise, not an upstart company from the developing world but one with decades of experience doing good business. Earlier, I presented an excerpt from the “About Tata Motors” slug, present in some of the releases, which also emphasized the company’s access to global markets, its ranking in the global automotive industry, and its ties with foreign companies.
On the other hand, the organization’s global footprint and aspirations were also expressed through an antagonistic, almost underdog, frame. This was especially true, when detailing how the greats of the world automobile industry had rejected the idea of a Rs 1 lakh car, and Tata Motors had triumphed over a seemingly hostile global audience in being able to produce the Nano. For instance, in his speech at the Nano unveiling, Tata (2008) said,

Many said this dream could not be achieved. Some scoffed at what we would produce, perhaps a vehicle comprising two scooters attached together or perhaps an unsafe rudimentary vehicle, a poor excuse for a car. Let me assure you and also assure our critics that the car we have designed and we will be presenting to you today will indeed meet all the current safety requirements of a modern day car… Despite what the critics said, despite what our antagonistic[s] did, we pursued our vision to give India an affordable people's car that had not been produced anywhere in the world. In fact, a car that most people said could not be manufactured for that kind of price.

The excerpt combines the idea of the tirelessly working Tata ‘team’, the visionary Ratan Tata himself, and the technological advancement of the company, together with the “promise” of delivering on aspirations, and national progress through establishing a global footprint. Thus, there are clearly several discursive strands at play here, both of ‘marketization’ (giving the customer what s/ he wants), ‘building’ (building something great for India in the world), and ‘war/ conflict’ (competing against global companies to produce the Nano). The subjective modality expressed is exceedingly strong because it taps into the humanist narrative of aspirations and expresses solidarity with the ‘common man’. The rhetorical strategy of beating the odds frames the global competition in an antagonistic light, over which the organization (and the man/ team) have proven victorious.

National progress through establishing a global footprint was also seen in the organization’s reference to its buying Jaguar and Land Rover, from the Ford Motor Company in early 2008 (see Tata Motors, 2008f):
Through subsidiaries and associate companies, Tata Motors has operations in the UK, South Korea, Thailand and Spain. Among them is Jaguar Land Rover, a business comprising the two iconic British brands. (Tata Motors, 2008i)

While the wording of the takeover is not really all that spectacular – this was part of the “About Tata Motors” slug at the base of the release – it is relevant in that the buyout of the “iconic British brands” was much feted in the domestic media as a sort of Indian ‘revenge’ for British colonial rule (see Lall, 2008; TOI, 2008d). Accordingly, its inclusion in a press release that announced the new site of the Nano factory bolsters the company’s reputation as a socially responsible organization, with national interests in mind, and one that is extremely important to the 21st century nation-building project for India.

The second research question, focused on the Organization-State linkage and its implications for crafting corporate development as nation-building, thus considers not only the social construction of the organization and the State as social actors, but also the relations they involve and their constitution of external stakeholders, such as vendors, employees, customers and impacted communities like Singur. The promise of economic growth, which is projected to be apolitical or post-political, hinging on employment opportunities and a global footprint, becomes important here in ensuring support for corporate development. Aspirations are sought to be placated, on both a micro and macro scale, but the mechanism by which this is expected to happen is very much in the old modernization trickle-down mode. Accordingly, several dialectics emerge in the understanding of corporate development and responsibility here – between neoliberal capitalism, philanthropy and charity, Gandhian ethics, Nehruvian statism, and communitarian philosophies.

Singur: “... The Communities We Serve”

Organizational tactics of silencing depend as much as on the social actors and views to be silenced, as they do on the organization’s motives. It is beyond the scope of this study to address the different strategies employed for both the land acquisition protesters and the environmentalists, and I concentrate on the former here. In doing so, I am aware that the study contributes to the silencing of an important perspective and this choice hence demands justification. First, of all the organization’s
stakeholders, the local community at Singur was arguably the most directly impacted by the Nano project. Second, the emphasis accorded to impacted local/ neighboring communities by the Tata Group in its slogan (“Improving the quality of life of the communities we serve.”) makes this perspective particularly important. Finally, as I earlier recounted, many prominent environmentalists (such as Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy) joined the farmers’ protests. Thus, though their voices were later subsumed by the political parties which then joined the fray, my focus on the land acquisition protests is not completely oblivious to the environmental cause either.

As explained in Chapter 4, I draw on the sequence of events to produce a historically situated, socially embedded account of the discursive strategies used by the organization in its media releases, in response to the Singur land acquisition protests. Accordingly, four main ‘stages’ of the company’s stance vis-à-vis the protesters have been identified below. In doing so, I address the fourth research question raised at the start of this study.

First Stage: Ignore and Divert. For the greater part of the period examined, the media releases were notably silent on the protests organized by the Singur locals. (Even in some of the other organizational literature studied, for instance the website and other reports, there was no mention of the Singur protests, other than a lop-sided admission from one of the CSR officers at Singur in the CSR annual report that social responsibility in the area was “complicated”.) It was only as late as September 2, 2008, that the company issued a release directly acknowledging the protests and suspending work at the plant. But prior to that, the strategy seems to have been threefold: to ignore the protests entirely, to reify a social reality where the project enjoyed “enthusiastic support” (Tata Motors, 2007d) from the local community, and to divert attention away from them using alternative subjects.

Reification of the organization-preferred view (Clair, 1998, Deetz, 1992, 2005) occurs in the manufacture of consent, usage of key words, giving prominence to relatively minor events or visits, and taking approval to be implicit where it is not voiced. For instance, the organization goes beyond “whole-hearted welcome” to posit an “ineradicable emotional bond between the company and the community” (Tata Motors, 2007h), showing how evocative word-play may result in the amplification of affirmation.
In another situation, a visit by a small delegation of villagers to the company’s prize Jamshedpur facility is showcased to be evidence of whole-hearted approval by the Singur community:

   Meanwhile, the second team of Panchayat leaders will visit Tata Motors’ Jamshedpur plant and operations in the first week of February. The first team of Panchayat leaders had visited Jamshedpur on January 17. They have immensely appreciated the company’s operations and community development initiatives, and have extended whole-hearted support for the project in Singur. (Tata Motors, 2007d)

The organization also waxes eloquent about the “enthusiastic participation of Singur villagers in various unskilled jobs” (Tata Motors, 2007b) and their response to it’s training program (Tata Motors, 2007c, 2007d, 2007o, 2008h). Importantly, in none of the releases that deal with the training, testing or employment schedules for local residents is there feedback from the villagers or trainees themselves – it is implicit in the wording of the releases that the employment creation is welcome to the local residents, and will have tremendous benefits. For instance,

   The successful candidates will then undergo 15 months’ hands-on training at Tata Motors facilities to make them multi-skilled. On successful completion of this 15-month programme, the trainees will take the trade tests to qualify for trade certificates issued by the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and will become eligible for employment at the Singur plant and vendor facilities. (Tata Motors, 2008h)

This excerpt (which shows manifest intertextuality with a previous release dated September 18, 2007) smoothly treats the training program, trade certificates and potential jobs for locals at the car factory as welcome to the Singur community. There is no grappling with the issue that some local community members may not seek employment at the factory – these people and their rural narratives (see Pal & Dutta, 2009) are completely erased and disqualified from consideration, so that the organizational perspective may be naturalized (Deetz, 1992).

The diversionary strategy of the media releases focused on several ‘alternative subjects’, many of which I have highlighted earlier: the role of corporate development as akin to national growth and
progress (Tata, 2008; Tata Motors, 2006, 2007e, 2007h); the benefits of employment generation in the region (Tata Motors, 2007a, 2007c, 2007d, 2007f, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j, 2008h); community development such as women’s training programs, healthcare services and education by the company in Singur (Tata Motors, 2007b, 2007g, 2007i, 2008l); and the launch of new products on the domestic and global stage (Tata, 2008; Tata Motors, 2008e, 2008j, 2008n). In all these cases, the use of suitably vague nominalizations (on issues of employment and growth-benefits, for instance), strong modality, and intertextuality with the company’s other accounts of its CSR activities serve to further legitimize and naturalize the company’s preferred view of things. For instance:

Tata Motors is confident that the plant will become a catalyst for both greater well-being of Singur families and growth of the region. The automobile plant will boost development in the state. (Tata Motors, 2007h)

The nominalizations that appear in these two lines are many: “catalyst”, “greater well-being of Singur families”, “growth in the region”, “boost development in the state”. They represent three out of the four alternative subjects highlighted above (the exception being, ‘launch of new products’). Instead of addressing the protests, the release showcases the factory as a growth “catalyst”, without explaining exactly what kind of growth it is angling for, and how this catalyst will eventually work. The same holds true, when the release mentions “well-being” of the local families: how does the company understand well-being, how will it measure the increment to this, and how will the car project contribute – these are all unanswered questions. At the same time, these themes – and the words themselves – are commonly found throughout the media releases, exhibiting rampant intertextuality, and are very strongly articulated – the company brooks no dissent to its preferred view in the monologic media release. The releases are targeted to the urban-based media, investor and customer base, for who issues like economic growth, technological advancement and global business trends are most relevant. Accordingly, they universalize the interests of this particular niche (Deetz, 2005), instead of focusing on the rural protests or the dynamics behind them. The Singur protests are thus swept under the carpet during this phase, and directly addressed only when both the media attention and the actual protests heat up further.
Second Stage: Engagement? The question mark here signifies the ambiguous nature of the organization’s engagement with the land acquisition protesters. Engagement here appears to be vague, and might even be considered to be a form of offense, not all-out ‘war/ conflict’ but close enough. When the organization first acknowledged the protests, they were referred to as “continued confrontation and agitation at the site”, “environment of obstruction, intimidation and confrontation”, and “intimidation and fear” (Tata Motors, 2008k) – hardly terms conducive for a genuine engagement with alternative views. Also interesting is how the media releases use the term “continued” and other phrases (“five continuous days”, “no change”, etc.) to imply the organization has addressed this problem before, though this was in fact the first time the protests were ever addressed in the releases – revealing thereby a reliance on interdiscursvity via external news coverage. Importantly, the organization never explicitly entered into dialogue with the dissidents, stressing that it is the role of the State to do so (Tata Motors, 2008b, 2008c, 2008k) – true to its construction of itself as apolitical victim. The company repeatedly framed the negotiations as occurring between the West Bengal state government and “the agitators in Singur”, and posed almost as merely an interested observer who was “distressed at the limited clarity on the outcome of the discussions” (Tata Motors, 2008b) – though of course, it had much at stake in the negotiations. Moreover, one might even detect a veiled threat to both the State and the local community, in the quotation attributed to a nameless spokesperson on the company’s suspension of work at the site:

Commenting on the situation, a Tata Motors spokesperson said, “The situation around the Nano plant continues to be hostile and intimidating. There is no way this plant could operate efficiently unless the environment became congenial and supportive of the project. We came to West Bengal hoping we could add value, prosperity and create job opportunities in the communities in the State.” (Tata Motors, 2008k)

On the one hand, the organization ratifies its fundamental purpose and the primacy of “the project”. On the other, it sends a message to both the State and the local community that, if things do not turn out conducive to the project, it has the option of moving lock, stock and barrel. At stake, for the both the State and the community are the “value, prosperity and… job opportunities” the organization had to offer.
Engagement, however, is signaled in instances where the company refers to “all stakeholders” and the need to “evoke a positive response from the residents of Singur… [and] create a congenial environment” (Tata Motors, 2008c) on-site. At the same time, the organization remains true to its neoliberal compulsions, and takes care to stress on the “sustained operations of an industrial enterprise”, not just the overall community development or regional growth. Furthermore, it is likely, especially given its earlier aggressive stance on the “hostile and intimidating” (Tata Motors, 2008k) situation caused by the protesters, that the organization does not really consider this group as a legitimate stakeholder in the negotiation process. Instead, when the releases are seen via interdiscursive lens as a sequence rather than isolated texts, a situation emerges where the company, through the auspices of the State and the mediation of the press, tries to get non-dissenting segments of the community to apply pressure on the dissidents to fall into line. This is borne out by the series of releases issued by the company during September 2008, starting with its veiled threat (considered earlier) and culminating in its support for “the recent initiatives” (Tata Motors, 2008c) of the State.

The rhetorical schema used by the company at this stage is that of the innocuous-sounding “statement” (2008b, 2008c) – a tactic usually used by media releases to address controversial situations. Moreover, the ‘statement’ is attributed to an unnamed “spokesperson” (2008b, 2008c, 2008k) at the organization, enabling senior management to voice its concerns/ views on the issue, without having to be directly named. Earlier, I examined how the company projects itself as an active social agent, largely the master of its own destiny. Yet, in the September 2008 series of releases, the organization adopted a passive frame for itself. It was “distressed at” (2008b) the situation, “has been constrained” (2008k) to suspend work on-site, and “hopes” (2008c) for a positive outcome, but affirmed “there is no way” (2008k) the plant can operate unless negotiations were successful. Moreover, it portrayed itself as not directly involved in the talks with the protesters (2008b, 2008c, 2008k, 2008m). But the passive frame is an imperfect one, because despite the organization’s affirmed helplessness, it still possesses substantial power. For instance, it reaffirms that it can “play an active role in the re-industrialization of the State of West Bengal and make a contribution to the economic development of the region, providing direct and
indirect employment opportunities and participating in the overall community development” (Tata Motors, 2008c). Accordingly, the power of capital ownership (see Garvey & Newell, 2005) dominates the social construction of the organization as apolitical victim. Thus the stage of engagement (?) shows the use of organizational tactics that emphasize the ambiguity/plausible deniability of the company on the land acquisition and accommodate a clearly hollow pacification of dissenting views (Clair, 1998; Deetz, 1992), without taking on any real responsibility toward the impacted community.

Third Stage: Offense. Till October 3, 2008, talks were ongoing between the State and representatives of the Singur protesters; on this date, however, Tata Motors publicly announced its decision to relocate from Singur and took the opportunity to directly attack the Singur protesters. Organizational strategies during this third ‘stage’ consisted of a mix of disqualification of social actors and their practices, denying them positions of any real power or value, the reification of organizational views, legitimation by higher authority or experiences (Clair, 1998; Deetz, 1992, 2005), and the infusion of politics in the Othering of dissidence. For instance, the organization drew on socio-historical context to stress its noble intentions regarding corporate development, economic growth and CSR activities, and its lawful partnership/links with the State. Consider,

Mr. Tata reiterated that the location of the NANO project in West Bengal was an expression of faith in the investor friendly atmosphere created by the State Government. The project was to be a show case plant which would have considerably enhanced the visibility of the State, created jobs for the younger citizens of the State and through the company’s community programs, would have enhanced the quality of life of the urban and rural population. (Tata Motors, 2008m)

Thus, the organizational view of reality, that is, the organizational project’s benefits to the local community, is naturalized/reified both by universalizing it to larger societal/community needs (“jobs for the younger citizens”) and also by invoking the legitimacy of the State (“investor friendly atmosphere created by the State Government”). Whereas earlier attempts to avoid the Singur protests, pacify the protesters using hollow reassurances, use nominalizations to produce ambiguity in its discourse, or to disqualify the dissidents as non-representative (with the State as sole representative of the people) had
failed, the media releases now frame the land acquisition dissidents as violent, volatile, illegal, repressive and anti-national/ anti-community.

The dissidents are, in a sense, framed to be everything the organization is not. As opposed to Tata Motors, which “displayed immense patience and had sincerely hoped the situation would improve” (Tata Motors, 2008m), the protesters are “volatile” (Tata Motors, 2008k), the mob metaphor is invoked, and their goal is presented not so much as wanting to hold on to their way of life, as it is refusing growth and development. Organizational common sense is seen in the company’s decision to move, since the violent situation has made “it impossible to continue” so that there is “no option but” (Tata Motors, 2008m) to relocate. As stated in the release, “Throughout the construction period, despite the constant obstruction and acts of aggression, staff and the contractors continued to work in the hope that the situation would normalize and the company’s bonafides would be understood”. The organization’s “hard decision” to move is therefore presented as merely common sense, not the expression of power by a dominant entity over a subaltern element.

Next, the organization showcases itself as a paragon of legal virtue, whereas the dissidents are violent and indulging in illegal modes of protest. They create a “heightened level of agitation and hostility”, an atmosphere of “intimidation and fear” that makes it impossible for law-abiding company representatives to operate: “Threats, intimidation and instances of assault and general obstruction in one form or the other have been the order of the day” (Tata Motors, 2008m). By extension, the violent and volatile protesters are dangerous not only to the company but also to other law-abiding citizens elsewhere. The construction of the dissidents in such a light serves both to Other them from the community in which they have their roots, as well as to reiterate the organization’s own blamelessness in “these unfortunate circumstances”.

Whereas the organization plays the facilitator of growth, a benefactor of the community at large, ushering in jobs and development, the dissidents are deemed to be repressive, preventing people from going about their normal activities and daily life, disrupting the flow of the humanist narrative (Tata Motors, 2008m). The organization’s decision to relocate the car project from Singur stems out of its
“concern for the physical security of their staff, contractors and vendors”, and even in this it showcases “extreme anguish” by the decision. The expression of sorrow implies solidarity with the local community and citizens of the state, together with regret for the employment and other benefits that the company is now unable to provide.

Finally, the organization projects the land acquisition protesters as politically motivated, drawing a contrast with itself and its ideals of post-political growth. Despite its encouragement of the nation-building ethic and emerging economy aspirations to promote the Nano and its own corporate development, the organization steps into the shoes of apolitical victim to decry the vested interests of the opposition political party spearheading the protest movement. By this time, the voices of the movement were mainly dominated by the Trinamul Congress party, which afforded the company some leeway to paint the dissidence with largely political overtones. At the same time, it continued to declare its support for the State, the emerging economy aspirations of the (urban) people, and predicted the economic boom to follow at the organizational project’s new location. Accordingly, the protesters are shown to be responsible for the ultimate destruction of job-creation, education opportunities, women’s emancipation, health care and community development. Consider,

In doing so [that is, moving from Singur], the company recognizes all the cooperation it has received from the State Government and states categorically that the NANO project having to be moved from West Bengal is entirely due to the continued agitative actions by the opposition party led by Ms. Mamata Banerjee with total disregard for the rule of law. (Tata Motors, 2008m)

The leader of the opposition party, Mamata Banerjee, is mentioned twice by name in the page-long media release, with negative connotations both times. She is identified as the clear leader of the protest movement at Singur. The release repeatedly links political interests with the protests and treats it as an obstacle to the organizational project: “in the interest of the project’s success and viability and in light of the opposition’s continued agitation, there was no option but to move the project out of the State of West Bengal” (italics added).
However, the organization seems to miss the irony that, in directly holding the opposition political party responsible for the dissidence and throwing its own weight behind the State (and by extension, the party which forms the state government), it enters the political fray as well, despite its agenda of post-political growth. The declaration in the media release is quite politically charged, for a business group avowedly not involved in politics. Accordingly, while the organization tries to emphasize its neoliberal understanding of business, the Organization-State-Politics nexus revealed here recalls the Statist model of corporate social responsibility: though the organization attempts to capitalize on support from the State, it also falls into a trap of its own making, in denouncing the political. The infusion of politics and it’s pitting against free-market economic growth opportunities, is thus a unique measure to frame alternative views that emerge, which merits further detailed study by scholars of organizational communication.

Fourth Stage: Ignore. Direct references to the Singur protests vanish from the media releases right after the October 3, 2008, release announcing the organization’s decision to relocate. For the last two releases studied, the focus shifted once more to the Nano’s launch and the expected economic benefits to its new home of Gujarat. The organization takes care to mention the “overwhelming support from several states for relocating the plant” (Tata Motors, 2008i) and the “unprecedented interest” (Tata Motors, 2009) in the Nano. At its new site, the organizational project was granted a much larger area of land to build on, 1100 acres as opposed to the earlier 997 acres, and this is also mentioned in the release (2008i). A quotation attributed to Ratan Tata blends the primacy of the neoliberal capitalism, the Organization-State partnership, and the ‘trickle-down’ theory of development.

Speaking at the announcement, Mr. Ratan N. Tata, Chairman of Tata Sons and Tata Motors, said, “The site in Gujarat, already under the possession of the state government, will help Tata Motors establish a new dedicated mother plant with the shortest possible time lag and least possible incremental project cost. This is Tata Motors’ maiden venture in Gujarat, and will broaden the company’s manufacturing footprint. We are happy to contribute to Gujarat’s strong
industrial progress by creating an auto cluster, which will have a cascading impact on the state’s economy.” (Tata Motors, 2008i, emphasis in original)

Since the new land granted to the organizational project was “already under the possession of the state government”, Tata Motors was able to avoid the bad publicity associated with land acquisition from farmers, as in Singur. The organization expresses satisfaction at the “least possible incremental project cost”, and assures the State of “strong industrial progress… which will have a cascading impact on the state’s economy”. Moreover, Tata is portrayed as the fearless leader, leading his company (and the citizens of the state) on to newer opportunities and better prospects. Tactics like strong objective modality and nominalizations, like “strong industrial progress” and “cascading impact”, among others, reinforce the organization’s perspective. Importantly, “progress” is urban-defined and industry-oriented here, rather than agriculture-based; and there is a reliance on the trickle-down mechanism to spread economic growth.

As far as the Singur land acquisition protests are concerned, however, it is as if the company has washed its hands off the entire incident and decided not to address the topic again. The same is true for the corporate web site and other organization-authored reports studied: while Tata Motor’s CSR activities at Singur prior to the move are detailed in the annual CSR report (Tata Motors, 2008o) and the Towards Sustainability report (Tata Motors, 2007k), there is no mention of either the protests or whether the organization plans to continue its CSR work in the region. While one of the earlier media releases (Tata Motors, 2008k) mentioned the company was “exploring the possibility of absorbing” the locally trained employees at its other factories, this was couched in terms of a nominalization (both “exploring” and “possibility”), and is not mentioned again in later releases or in other reports by the organization. As far as the organization is concerned then, Singur is a closed chapter.

The sequential analysis of the organizational strategies used to face the Singur protesters reveals a nuanced approach that uses tools of both placation and dismissal. The social construction of the organization, discussed earlier in this chapter, has necessarily been important for the organizational strategies used here – chiefly, that of the organization as neo-capitalist, (active) benefactor, and apolitical victim. But while the organization has desired to stay out of the limelight through its ‘ignore and divert’
strategy, it has been roped into the tussle between the State and the protesters; its efforts to paint itself as post-political have backfired, and the Singur protests evolved from a humanitarian struggle to a deeply political issue. Accordingly, while the organization prides itself on ‘responsibility’, its stance in the Singur protests falls markedly short of its stated ideals.

Discursive Practice: Mediated Themes

In the final step of this tri-dimensional analysis, I study the ‘discursive practice’ surrounding the Tata Motors media releases. Noting the multiple steps in discursive practice, so that interpretation is never really uniform (Fairclough, 1992; Hardy & Phillips, 2004), I focus on the transformation of discourse from media release to news coverage in this study. This level of analysis is invaluable in understanding the appropriation of voice/ silence from organizational source to social memory in the media, so that organizational colonization may operate using the Organization-Media linkages (Deetz, 1992). In particular, I examine the stories and editorials in The Times of India (Mumbai edition) over a period of three months – December 2007, January 2008 and February 2008 – in the immediate pre-launch, launch and post-launch periods of the Tata Nano, respectively. The Times of India is India’s largest read English daily (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006; Media Research User’s Council, 2007). Given that Indian dailies continue to grow at a strong pace, adding 12.6 million readers from 2005 to reach 203.6 million in 2006 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006), the scope of organizational colonization through newspaper media is particularly significant. During the period under study (December 2007-February 2008), a total of 29 articles concerned with the Nano appeared in The Times of India.

Using Owen’s (1984) method of analysis to draw out themes based on three criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness, twelve ‘markers’ or ‘indicators’ were identified from the news coverage, following which they were reassembled and recombined into four major themes. I argue that these media themes, based on the “frozen images” of their constituent markers/ indicators, contribute to the social construction of the organization, the State, the media, protesters and citizens in the social memory of the general population (Deetz, 1992; Mumby, 1988).
National Progress through Global Footprint

The most prolific markers expressing global-national progress directly emphasized the historical nature of the Nano launch. Apart from several instances where this was shown through adjectives like “the world’s cheapest car” and comparisons with the Ford T-Model or the Moon-landing (mentioned in Tata’s launch speech, Tata, 2008, and overlapping with the technological advancement news indicator to be discussed later), there were many stand-alone remarks that emphasized somber history-in-the-making. Regardless of whether one was “a chronicler of history or an industry specialist or just a plain automotive enthusiast” (Darukhanawala, 2008a), the Nano launch would quite simply “make automobile history” (Mamgain & Athale, 2008).

Identification with the larger issue of globalization was achieved in two ways: a direct positioning of India vis-à-vis the so-called West, and emphasizing Indian business’s international links. The construction of a direct rivalry, both economic and technological, between India and the West was seen through instances where Tata’s “all-new out-of-the-box concept” was held up against unsuccessful attempts by Japanese, Chinese, or European manufacturers (Darukhanawala, 2008b). The Nano and the Delhi Auto show where it was unveiled was also compared to ailing U.S.-based Ford Motors and the Detroit Motor Show, held at around the same time. In particular, it was mentioned that “the bulk of Ford's losses came from its home market where it has faced a steady loss of market share to Asian rivals” (AFP, 2008). Ford and Detroit’s financial woes and “terminal decline” were held in contrast to the seemingly burgeoning fortunes of Tata and “the fledgling market in India” (Rajghatta, 2008). Other “rivals” that were positioned in the media coverage included China’s small car Chery, Japan’s Suzuki, and France’s Renault Logan.

On quite a different plank were several other mentions that emphasized national progress by highlighting collaborative (rather than rival) links with foreign companies. Prominent mentions of various British and Canadian partnerships showcased the global effort behind the production of the Nano, even though the major thrust was Indian (PTI, 2008b, 2008c). In the case of the British collaboration, the involvement of noted industrialist-turned-member of the House of Lords, Lord Swraj Paul, who is himself
of Indian origin, further built on the idea of Indian business leadership in the global arena. In the story detailing the Canadian collaboration, a quotation from a noted think tank saying that “Canadian companies should not miss great business avenues in India” was particularly highlighted (PTI, 2008b). There is thus the indicator of future global tie-ups and innovations by Indian industrialists, with the more explicit recognition that India has ‘arrived’. Another story on a deal with French company MDI to develop an air-powered car (IANS, 2008) showcased both the collaborating-with-the-world indicator, and also the next marker of this macro theme: remarkable technological advancement by Indian industry.

Technological (read: industrial) advancement is posed as the choice path to global economic advances for India. Several articles highlight the advances by Indian designers and engineers, and international recognition thereof. Often, this is drawn as a contrast to the failures of other countries or companies to come up with the small car. Thus, in a column, Prahalad (2008) writes, “Yes, Indian engineers—given the right challenges and leadership—can out-innovate and out-engineer others. Seldom does a single product introduction challenge the received wisdom in the industry so radically.” Together with pride in new technological gains by Indian firms, there is the direct acknowledgement that Indians are superb at judicial cost-cutting, “slashing materials costs and weight resulting in the car’s fuel efficiency” (Darukhanawala, 2008c) – something that has traditionally been considered a desirable trait in Indian culture (Kaushik, 1997).

The final indicator for the ‘national progress through global footprint’ theme was a set of references to future greatness, thus treating the successful launch of the Nano as a harbinger for future advances by Indian firms in global business. While this was inherent in many of the excerpts already discussed and is also to be found in some of the other macro themes, several articles had the indicator on a stand-alone basis. For instance, Lall (2008) highlighted the implications of the Nano launch for stronger business ties in the world market, a “significant – and symbolic – indicator of the great tectonic shift eastwards in the new geo-politics of economics”, following the arrival of a high-powered British delegation to New Delhi. Another piece, written about an industry-level meeting of Indian information technology companies, argued that the Nano “has shown Indian firms have a lot to offer in terms of
engineering and design” (Sachdeva, 2008) – even for industries, like IT, which are relatively unrelated to automotives.

Constructing a ‘New’ Indian Citizen

The issue of leadership is central to organizations; even as literature on Asian MNCs has focused strongly on the adaptation in the path to internationalization (see Khandwalla, 2002) it is also natural that media narratives on global efforts by Indian firms deal extensively with the caliber of chairpersons. This is especially important in the case of family-business networks (Carney, 2005) like the Tata Group, and there have been several news articles examining the group’s professionalism, succession issues, and adaptation (Ellis, 2002). An important indicator of the second theme was how the personal valorization of Tata Chairman Ratan Tata as Business Icon and Visionary was used to script the ‘new’ Indian, as both businessman and citizen, in the age of globalization. Admittedly, much of this valorization comes from the organization itself, in its framing of press releases and media interviews. For instance, the line “a promise is a promise” (Reuters, 2008b) that has been used liberally in the media coverage was both in the officially issued release (Tata Motors, 2008n) and uttered by Tata himself on the day of the launch (Tata, 2008). Its unfiltered transmission from official mouthpiece to national daily is telling of the strong Organization-Media linkages, as a result of increasing corporate colonization (Deetz, 1992). Tata is portrayed in the media as a committed Indian, one who stood up to his “promise” and “vision”, delivering salvation to thousands of his fellow Indians – as noted by columnist Prahalad (2008) when he declares, “Ratan Tata, Tata Motors, and all the suppliers and dealers deserve our thanks for rekindling the innovative spirit of India.”

Another element of the construction of ‘new’ Indian citizen through Tata’s valorization is seen in an interview, when he is asked to compare the Nano launch to the 2007 acquisition of Anglo-Dutch steel major Corus by group company Tata Steel (Surendar & Bose, 2008). Even though the US$ 12 billion Corus buy was the largest overseas acquisition by an Indian company, with arguably more implications for Indian business worldwide than the Nano launch, Tata himself plays it down, saying “Corus was a transaction. It got a lot of visibility but we didn't build anything.” Instead, he affirms, it was with the
Nano, a brand new “creation”, that his real passions lay, since “there is a different level of excitement when you are building something”. The underlying message here is biased in favor of active entrepreneurship and creation of value, rather than mere “transaction”, in order to be considered worthy of the mantle of Business Icon and ‘new’ Indian citizen.

The valorization indicator was related – and expanded in – to the second marker of this theme: the team cohesion of the Tata group. This was found in articles that praised the Tata team for “sticking doggedly to their task and beavering away” to deliver the small car (Darukhanawala, 2008a) – a quality in line with traditionally perceived Indian culture praising selfless and dedicated hard work (Dissanayake, 1987). Moreover, technological advancement and innovation are held to result directly from a “collective thought process… engulfing everyone from the man at the helm of affairs to the shop floor operator” (Darukhanawala, 2008b), again propagating the traditional collectivist notion of Indian culture. In an interview, Ratan Tata replied to a question about his (eventual) successor, saying that there were a number of equally talented people in his “team” but to prevent team dissent he would not announce his successor beforehand (Surendar & Bose, 2008). This emphasis on team cohesion has two major implications. First, focusing on the effective prowess of a team lends credibility to truly “transformational leadership” that can bring about change (Khatri, Ng, & Lee, 2001). Also, strong team cohesion allows for a clear and unambiguous identification with the organizational values that may “form more invisible and potentially, in the long run, more stultifying suppression” (Deetz, 1992, p. 322).

The team indicator stands midway between the man (Ratan Tata) and the aspirations of ordinary (urban) Indian citizens; the deliverance on aspirations is the final indicator of the ‘new’ Indian citizen theme, and was the most common throughout the theme analysis, seen in the construction of the Nano as the “people’s car” (Tata, 2008). The more common media narrative focuses on the inspirational idea of Nano-empowered mobility – “they come to see hope emerge on wheels” – and the unproblematic scripting of Ratan Tata’s supposed “image of a lower middle-class man on a scooter” (TOI, 2008h) propagates this dimension of delivering on aspirations. Another related stream delved into the facts and figures of business analysts, reporting in hard numbers what the earlier moralistic/ aspiration-based story
did: “a 65 per cent increase in the number of families that can afford a car” because of the Nano (Agencies, 2008). Supporting this were testimonies from car dealers attesting to mass-queries on the Nano, showcasing how the car may potentially bridge the urban-rural divide (Doval, 2008). Even politicians joined the fray, with the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) opining that “reservations” should be made for the car, so that the Nano was readily available to India’s underprivileged classes (PTI, 2008a). This was especially ironic given the BJP’s initial acrimony towards the car on account of the Singur land acquisitions for the Tata Motors factory (PTI, 2006). It suggests that the fever-pitch media campaign showcasing the Nano and its makers made it politically untenable to oppose it.

**Watching the State**

A larger number of articles published during the period under review focused on the statements of State officials, regarding the Nano project. Again, this is likely because the news characteristic of ‘prominence’ (Bender et al., 2009) gives more weight to high-ranking State administrators than to unknown rural protesters. The coverage by The Times of India gives credence to the Organization-State linkages observed in the media releases, earlier in this chapter. For instance, in a representation of explicit State support and approval on the organizational project, officials of the state government are said to have “expressed happiness” (PTI, 2008d) over the unveiling of the Nano.

Stating that the people’s curiosity about the small car was satisfied with the unveiling of the car, state Industry Minister Nirupam Sen said that work (on the project) was progressing according to schedule and would be completed in time.

“We are happy. West Bengal will benefit from the Tata's Singur project,” he told reporters. Thus, the State’s basic argument (of eventual economic gains to the region and citizens) is prominently featured in the media coverage. Further references suggest the State’s active assistance to the company, bordering on the level of co-authorship; for example, in the announcement of a new irrigation project at Singur, and the state industry minister announcing when the car will roll out for mass production (Reuters, 2008a; TOI, 2008g).
The state government on Tuesday reiterated [Tata Motors’ Managing Director] Ravi Kant’s stand and made it clear that the first small car would roll out well before deadline. [West Bengal Commerce and Industries Secretary] Sabyasachi Sen said, “The car market is a highly competitive one. If the Tatas showcase their car in Delhi this month, rollout must be on the cards.” (TOI, 2008g)

Another article, appearing towards the end of January 2008, after the car had been launched, strikes a pat-on-the-back tone for the State, almost congratulating it on the legal validity of its land acquisition at Singur (TOI, 2008c).

While the media coverage appears unwilling to criticize the Nano and Tata Motors (judging by the two media themes examined previously), it does seem to keep a watchdog’s eye on the State, in terms of reporting internal protest by the governing party’s allies and external developments that may affect the State’s powers to acquire land for industrial purposes henceforth. For instance, with the protests at Singur increasingly becoming vocal, the newspaper (TOI, 2008b) reported,

The differences among Left Front partners on industrialization came to the fore yet again on Sunday, with Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh asking the Tatas to wind up their Singur small-car factory within a year… Terming the decision to allow the car plant at Singur as a "mistake", he asked the state government to take corrective steps. At a rally in Bajemelia, Ghosh said the Tata factory couldn't come up on the fertile Singur land.

Importantly, while the media coverage still does not give center-stage to the protesters themselves, it focuses on a politician whose party supports the ruling coalition, so it is actually a story more on the internal frictions within the State, which merely uses the Singur protests as a backdrop.

The paper also reported on another industrial project the State was involved in, and directly related its strategies in this case to the negative fall-out in Singur. Reporting on the West Bengal state government’s buy-out of farmland for a new airport city, the article (TOI, 2008a) points out how the negative reaction at Singur had forced the State to rethink its policy on land acquisition.
Commerce and industries secretary Sabyasachi Sen told TOI that the decision to directly buy out land was a fallout of the bitter experience in Singur. “We experimented with acquisition. Let's see how a negotiated purchase works out,” he said.

A month earlier, The Times of India (TOI, 2007) had also reported on a cap on the powers of state governments to acquire farmland for developing Special Economic Zones for industrial purposes. Accordingly, the State was allowed to henceforth acquire only single-crop or barren land for business development – a stipulation that, had it come a couple of years earlier, would have prevented the West Bengal state government from offering land in Singur to Tata Motors for the Nano factory. Accordingly, the State and its agents are clearly important targets for the media coverage.

Reframing the Dissident as the ‘Anti’ National Subject

The thematic analysis revealed at least two instances where the subaltern dissident had been re-framed in direct opposition to the Nano and, thereby, silenced (Clair, 1998): when dealing with news on the environmentalist protests (largely urban) and the land acquisition in Singur (mainly rural). In the preceding section, I argued that it was important to focus on land acquisition protesters in Singur, rather than on the environmentalists. However, the news coverage (at least for the three months under review) emphasizes more on the environmentalist charges against Tata Motors and the Nano, rather than the Singur protesters. This is perhaps to be expected, given that the urban news media would deduce that their (largely) urban audience would be more interested to know what the (mainly) city-based environmentalists were alleging, rather than what some far-flung villagers were up to. Moreover, the role of relatively prominent environmentalist activists would be of more import to the news media (and by extension, its audience) than an obscure rural community. An internet search on the The Times of India website turned up more than a thousand mentions of Singur. However, only a small number of these corresponded to the period of the Nano launch. (Of course, things likely changed once the Singur protests grew more heated mid-2008, but media coverage from that period has not been considered in this study, for brevity’s sake.) Accordingly, before considering the scant news coverage on the land acquisition protesters, I shall briefly go over the framing of the environmental dissidents in The Times of India.
The news coverage is unanimously arrayed against the environmentalist protests, prompting speculation on whether this was a concrete editorial decision taken at the newspaper or an unconscious reaction. The criticisms against the “sanctimonious greens” (Aiyar, 2008) are ordered along four lines: firstly, that their fears are unfounded because the car is technologically faultless (Surender & Bose, 2008) and so “this is a car the greens should embrace rather than oppose” (Darukhanawala, 2008c), which falls in line with the earlier technological advancement indicator of the global-national progress theme; secondly, that the technological innovation is so great that criticizing it will be morally wrong, and so the environmentalists should instead look at this as an invitation for future debate (Prahalad, 2008) – an approach which does not take the environmentalists’ concerns seriously; thirdly, that campaigning against the Nano will not solve any of the environmentalists’ core concerns, as these can only be solved by petitioning the government for better infrastructure, energy efficiency and so on (Aiyar, 2008; Prahalad, 2008); and lastly, that the environmentalists are guilty of “elitism parading as virtue” (Aiyar, 2008), opposed to the interests of lower middle class families who will benefit from the Nano and thus should be roundly condemned (Surender & Bose, 2008). There was a marked lack of dissenting views in the media coverage, and even where they were present, they are qualified or moderated by pro-Nano voices. For instance, in a story reporting ordinary people’s reactions to the Nano, there were only two voices of dissent. One of them was in a decidedly ‘anti’ Indian frame, with “I would like to leave India the very day this car comes on the road…”, which was placed in the story right below (and in direct opposition, it might be added) to a comment blatantly nationalist in fervor: “Great deal! Mr. Ratan TATA… hats off to you… I feel proud to be your countryman…” (TOI, 2008f).

Accordingly, several of the organizational tactics to silence dissident voices, identified by Clair (1998) and Deetz (1992, 2005), are seen to be at work here. The relative absence of pro-environmentalist voices in the media coverage clearly avoids this topic in the first place; invoking the technological advancement of the car or even the moral need to side with the ‘common man’ constitutes the usage of a higher order authority to legitimize the organizational view; technological advances are also used both as hollow pacification of environmentalist concerns and as plausible deniability for the company to fall back
upon; finally, using the ‘deliverance on aspirations’ card and framing the Nano as pro-nationalist
effectively disqualifies environmentalist protesters as anti-national and thus denies their arguments as of
any value.

The tactic of avoiding or discouraging a topic was also evident in the news coverage vis-à-vis the
Singur land acquisition protests – at least during the three months under review. There was little mention
of the protests or the protesters during this time, as the Nano launch was in the limelight. There was only
one story during this period in The Times of India, on some protests at the New Delhi Auto Expo where
the car was launched.

Amid the huge mass of mediapersons and other people gathered inside Hall No. 11 for a first look
at Tata's Nano car, a group of six women dressed in white T-shirts stood out. Written in bold red
on their T-shirts were provocative blurbs like ‘The Rs 1 lakh car has Singur people's blood on it’
and other such slogans… These were activists from a forum of left-leaning individuals and
organizations that calls itself the Delhi Solidarity Group, holding a protest against the ‘forcible’
land acquisition at Singur, West Bengal, for the Tata plant to produce the Rs 1 lakh car… But to
Tata's credit, no move was made to evict the protesters from the hall. (Bhattacharya, 2008)

In this excerpt, the use of terms like “provocative” to describe the protester’s messages tends to show
them as needlessly antagonistic, the use of apostrophes over the word “forcible” betrays a lack of concern
regarding the protesters’ stance, and the entire article sports an air of bemused condescension. The
description of the protestors as “left-leaning” suggests another means of silencing, by posing the
dominant organizational view as not only power-neutral but also ‘apolitical’ and rational (Deetz’s, 1992,
“common sense”), while the dissident view is shown to be partisan and politically motivated.

Interestingly, the excerpt marks explicitly that it was “to Tatas’ credit” that the protesters were not
forcibly removed. Thus, even while reporting on the protesters, Ratan Tata is valorized as the ideal ‘new’
citizen who shows restraint and patience, rather than falling in with the volatile protesters. Accordingly,
as seen earlier, the Singur protesters are disqualified on the basis of being political, volatile and
misguided, and the reification of organizational reality allows for a hollow pacification at most of the dissident view.

The thematic analysis of the news coverage thus shows an interesting convergence on several areas between the organization-authored press releases and an independent media. Clearly, several of the themes generated in the news coverage were echoing those highlighted by the media releases, seen in the analysis of discourse as text. The stress on some of these themes may vary, but the over-all convergence suggests nevertheless a close linkage between Organization-Media that demands further attention in future studies of organizational colonization.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

Thus far, I have presented the case study in terms of the various inter-organizational linkages that help construct social reality, understandings of corporate social responsibility, and organizational strategies used to frame dissidence. In this chapter, I present a brief summary of the study’s findings, ordered along the lines of the four research questions first raised in Chapter 1, followed by a discussion of some of its limitations and implications.

Findings

The four main research questions guiding this study have been asked below, followed by a brief summary of the findings that grapple with them.

*How is the Organization crafted as a social agent?*

The organization in the case study, Tata Motors, crafts itself as a social agent based on six main characteristics: its history/heritage, common sense as the (sole) domain of the organization, technological advancement, the role of a neo-capitalist, the organization as an active benefactor, and also as apolitical victim to political machinery. These characteristics were also supported in the widely accepted understandings of the corporate reputation of the organization, which hinged on its history/heritage, role in nation-building, technological advancement, global footprint and a deep-rooted sense of responsibility to stakeholders. The social construction of the organization along these lines was important for both the way it framed its organizational project (that is, the launch of the *Nano*) and any dissidents who opposed the organization-preferred view of things.

This construction of the organization clearly shows strains of several ideologies of corporate social responsibility, true to the dialectical approach towards discourse and globalization. For instance, notions of organizational common sense, the corporation as neo-capitalist, with an emphasis on sustainability and economic growth-oriented development, technological progress, access to global markets, personal leadership and corporate teams, and divorced from the political arena – all of these
ascribe to the ‘business’ case of corporate social responsibility, neo-capitalism, and sustainable development that still focuses on the bottom-line (see Chapter 2). A ‘marketization’ metaphor is also apparent in the media releases, testifying to the primacy of the ‘business case’ and the organization as neo-capitalist. The prominence of ‘marketization’ also suggests a market-oriented view of ‘building’, for instance in the ‘building’ of jobs, and community development that essentially fed back to the organizational project. At the same time, a focus on stakeholders (be they employees, vendors, partners, impacted communities or customers), stress on participatory ethics (even if much of it seems to be lip service), and an effort to engage impacted communities is reminiscent of the stakeholder models of CSR, that try to involve affected communities on a larger scale.

The more India-focused ethical-philanthropic and statist (Nehruvian) models of CSR are also apparent in the social construction of the organization here. Community development and the ‘organization as benefactor’ are roles suggested by ethical-philanthropic modes of CSR – and though pure Gandhian trusteeship has more in common with stakeholder models than it does with charity, several Indian business houses believe they are pursuing Gandhian means to a socially responsible end (see Chapter 3). Again, involvement with the State, partnership with State agencies, focus on establishing a global footprint and investing in technological advancement are considered hallmarks of the Nehru-promoted statist model of CSR. Accordingly, a strong ‘building’ metaphor is apparent in the media releases, pertaining to the establishment of institutions, corporate development, community development, nation-building and social service. The metaphor of ‘war/ conflict’ is also evident, especially when discussing the obstacles the organization has had to surmount in order to reach its present stature, in battling global MNCs, and in creating the Nano itself. Thus, the three metaphors of ‘marketization’, ‘building’ and ‘war/ conflict’ often intersect and coalesce in the text.

Other underlying dialectics and tensions are evident: for instance, the tension between personal valorization and feting the team effort, or emphasizing global links/ partnerships while also maintaining an underdog tone vis-à-vis more famous multinational corporations, stressing participatory ethics yet denying an effective voice to impacted communities and vendors/ partners, focusing on the organization
as an active agent but one that becomes conveniently passive when confronted by political protest, and so on. Several of these underlying tensions have been discussed in great detail in Chapter 5.

*How is the Organization-State relationship framed, and what are its implications for the nation-building ethic of corporate development and social responsibility?*

The Organization-State relationship is one of the key linkages instrumental in corporate colonization of the life-world (Deetz, 1992), and is accorded special importance in this study, given its emerging economy context. Both organizational and State history/heritage is significant here, so that Tata Motors’ corporate reputation, the aims/objects of the West Bengal state government, and the global context in which India finds herself all become important in the present study. Accordingly, a strong and active linkage between the organization and the State is revealed in the case study, clearly supporting the statist model of corporate responsibility outlined in Chapter 3. The State acquired land for the organizational project, teamed up with the corporation for training/employment rounds, and was the key negotiator with dissidents over the land acquisition at Singur. As far as the organization is concerned, it unambiguously states its goals of revitalizing industry in the state, expresses its support for State policies, and reaffirms its role in the nation-building project (which is expressed in terms of economic growth and employability enhancement). At the same time, it doggedly maintains its apolitical stand, avoiding a direct seat at the negotiating table with land acquisition protesters, but also comments at the failure of the talks in what may be regarded a blatantly political way. The juxtaposition of the political and the apolitical as far as the Indian organization is concerned is, therefore, a precarious and unstable one. The infusion of politics muddies the waters of the ‘business case’, casting the State as a very important stakeholder for the organizational project.

The social construction of the organization and the Organization-State relationship accordingly shapes the nation-building ethic of corporate development and social responsibility. The organization pushes a sort of post-political or apolitical vision of growth, which is wholly dominated by neo-capitalist ideas of employment, production, profits, markets and sustainability. Apolitical growth is focused on a trickle-down mechanism that assures everyone benefits, regardless of vested (political or capitalist)
interests, a largely urban-centered modernization-based version of development, enhanced employability for rural workers, and the welfare of stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, vendors, partners… - in essence, anyone without direct political linkages. At the same time, apolitical growth is based on very real and very human aspirations, on the individual, local, regional and national levels, involving all its stakeholders – employees, customers, managers, and so on. Emerging economy aspirations are dealt with more directly when the organization stressed on the importance of laying a global footprint for itself – the corporate development is supposed to showcase national progress, by focusing on the deliverance of incipient aspirations. Through the construction/ reflection of such aspirations, their deliverance, the underlying relationships that feed them, and the simultaneous alignment/ divorce from the State and political factors, the company crafts an intriguing ethic of nation-building that must be considered while studying corporate development and the organization’s role as a socially responsible company.

How does the Organization engage with dissidents, especially the land acquisition protests at Singur?

While the organization has several stakeholders and impacted communities, I focus on one of these in particular – the land acquisition protesters at Singur – to examine the tactics of engagement preferred by the organization. Tata Motors’ framing of the Singur protesters may be considered in terms of four ‘stages’, that is, to first ignore and divert them (as it does for the longest portion of the time period during when media releases were studied), then to make an attempt to engage with them (but indirectly, since the State was the official negotiator and the organization maintained itself to be apolitical), then to go on the offensive against them once the talks had clearly failed, and finally to seemingly ignore them all over again. In line with the metaphor of ‘war/ conflict’, several instances in the media releases recall the imagery of the organization at ‘war’ against the dissidents, outlining a wide mix of ‘war- strategies’ ranging from dismissal to all-out blame. Organizational strategies outlined by Clair (1998) and Deetz (1992, 2005) were also evident, in that the media releases sought to disqualify the protesters’ voices, reify the organization-preferred reality, universalize the interests of its urban stakeholders over the rural community, and engage in hollow pacification of the dissidents’ views. While one of the strategies
outlined by Clair (1992), that is, the personalizing or privatizing of dissident views so that they are kept put of the public domain, was not apparent in the case study at hand, the infusion of politics, references to nation-building and deliverance of aspirations constituted the emergence of another potent strategy of organizational Othering. Thus, protesters were painted as politically motivated, anti-national and anti-progress, both at the regional and national levels, in a frame that deserves further consideration, especially in the context of emerging economies.

How is the Organizational Project framed between the Organization-authored text and the Media coverage?

The final research question looks closely at the production, distribution, consumption and interpretation processes behind the text, while also shedding light on the inter-organizational linkages that reify corporate colonization. Accordingly, the study shows that the ‘normative’ structure of a media release has several inherent biases that may emphasize certain representations over others. For instance, the importance of appealing to prominence, using strong modality (both objective and subjective), using direct quotations, and being concise in length may result in: (a) focusing on famous organization, State and political personalities, rather than relatively unknown team participants or individual protesters, (b) naturalizing organizational reality, (c) appropriation of humanist narratives by the organization, and personal valorization rather than team-attribution, and (d) liberal usage of vague nominalizations, rather than concrete aims/ goals, respectively.

The thematic analysis of the news coverage, during the three months around the Nano launch in January 2008, sheds further light on the transformation of discourse between the organization and the media. The first two themes identified – national pride through a global footprint, and constructing the ‘new’ Indian – were the most common and vibrant in the media, as opposed to the protests against the Nano. While they and their constituent markers emerged in the analysis of the media releases as well, they seem to have gained a fillip in the media. Rather than matters of controversial protest, the news coverage focused on the aspirations of the so-called common man, the rising clout of India in the global arena, and showcased Ratan Tata and his company as representatives of a brave ‘new’ breed of global
Indians. The frozen/fragmented images of the news coverage show the ‘new’ Indian as focused on entrepreneurial activity, economic growth, and global ambitions. Despite the stress on the aspirations of the ‘common man’, this common man remains as faceless as ever, while prominent personalities like Ratan Tata are lauded as heroes and examples to be emulated by other Indians. Tata Motors’ global links are highlighted repeatedly, together with the ‘promise’ that the company is putting the country on the world map. Nation-building is framed in the social memory not just in terms of the country’s history/heritage and future greatness, but also through technological advancement, global links and global competition. The analysis thus testifies to the dialectical view of globalization and ‘traditional’ Indian culture examined in Chapter 3. Whereas the Singur community and Tata Motors’ CSR work in the area were the most widespread references in the media releases, this is never referred to in the news coverage. On the rare occasions that the protesters have been mentioned in the Times’ coverage, they are treated with humor and dismissed, or are disqualified as anti-growth, anti-progress and even, anti-national.

The news coverage may also be considered through the lens of ‘media as watch-dog’, a very traditional role of the news media (see Bender et al., 2009). In line with concerns that the media is increasingly lax on corporations (see Conrad, 2003a; Deetz, 1992; Roush, 2004), the news coverage is rarely critical of Tata Motors in the case study. Instead, it waxes eloquent about the Nano launch, and its implications for the so-called common man – betraying an adherence to what Charles Conrad (2003a) has called “free market fundamentalism”. When considering Mumby’s (1988) deconstruction of hero/villain roles in discourse, Ratan Tata and Tata Motors are portrayed in terms of active and ‘heroic’ social agents, a representation most conducive for the organization-preferred view of reality (recall Conrad’s, 2003a, “CEO-hero”). In turn, the so-called ‘common man’ and the larger community of Indians, whose aspirations are sought to be delivered, are largely portrayed as a passive crowd, who are ‘saved’ from the ignominy of being a ‘developing country’ and taken to ‘emerging economy’ status. At the same time, the focus of the media-watchdog over the State is interesting, in that it works along two planks. On the one hand, owing to its warm reception to the Nano project, the news coverage is largely receptive of the State’s arguments in favor of the Singur land acquisitions; on the other hand, it is also attuned to more
general political news such as tensions within the ruling coalition, diktats from the national government that impact future land acquisition by the State, and so on. While none of these planks are overtly critical of the State, they do not appear to be as amorous as the media themes dealing directly with the organization. The State is seemingly treated as a lesser partner of the organization in the news coverage surrounding the Nano.

Limitations of the Study

The study presents certain inherent limitations, most of which are methodological in nature, and may be considered in terms of their implications for future research on similar subjects.

First, there is the question of how representative or generalizable the case study method is. For instance, even though I have concentrated on the Nano in this study, references to another case might reveal different conclusions. For instance, in the case of a community project for irrigation also mentioned in Tata Motors’ annual CSR report (Tata Motors, 2008o), a strong participatory ethic and process is emphasized – which is at odds with the present study. Also, the question may be asked: how representative are these findings of a more general understanding of corporate responsibility among Indian organizations? While this is a common limitation of the case study method, in its defense, the present study embarks on a detailed, contextual examination, based on multiple texts and sites of analysis. Moreover, the prominence and clout of the organization involved suggests that it sets ‘standards’ for many other Indian corporations (see Kumar, 2004; Kumar et al., 2001; Lala, 2007; Mehta et al., 2006; Tata Motors, 2008o); accordingly, its policies and responses may be considered at least in some sense symptomatic of the larger Indian corporate context. All case studies involve a dialectic between particularity and generalizability (see Cresswell, 1997; Stake, 2000), and this study is no different.

I have adapted Norman Fairclough’s (1992) tri-dimensional mode of critical discourse analysis for this study, which examines discourse at the multiple sites of social context/practice, text and discursive practice. The actual method of analysis is quite open-ended, in that while Fairclough lays out guidelines for the close textual analysis of the text, he does not prescribe similar methods or elements of examination for either the social context/practice or the discursive practice, explicitly stating that it is for
the individual researcher to determine the best mode of analysis, depending on the circumstances. Given that the tri-dimensional method is naturally open for interpretation, a researcher using a different mode of analysis might form conclusions divergent from my own. For instance, a mode of textual analysis other than Owen’s (1984) at the site of discursive practices might reveal different themes regarding the Organization-Media linkages. Moreover, as considered in Chapter 4, Fairclough (1992) and Owen (1984) clearly understand ‘themes’ in different senses; accordingly, the transformation/transition of themes between the media release and news coverage might be problematic for some.

Another limitation of the study lies in the different window of analysis for the texts. That is, while the media releases chosen for close textual analysis were issued between May 2006 and February 2009, the news coverage studied from The Times of India was between December 2007 and February 2008. Accordingly, it could be argued that focusing on the same time period for both sites of analysis would more accurately track the transformation of organizational discourse. However, the news coverage time frame was chosen owing to the vast amount of news stories produced and published by The Times of India during this period; also this particular time period coincided with the actual unveiling of the Nano.

Focusing on different texts might also result in diverging conclusions. While this study has focused mainly on the corporate media releases on the Nano, focusing on other texts, such as the company’s Annual Report or its website, for close textual analysis might yield different interpretations on the dialectics of organizational colonization and corporate social responsibility. Again, while this study chose the news coverage in The Times of India as the site of discursive practice, owing to the newspaper commanding the largest readership among the English dailies in India, it is moot to analyze one of the higher-selling vernacular dailies of the country. An examination of the foreign media might also reveal discontinuities. For instance, while a preliminary investigation shows the history-in-the-making theme, the progress of Indian technology and MNCs, community focus, and focus on the personality of Ratan Tata, there seems to be a toning down of the national glorification and valorization of a “new” Indian; instead, what come to the fore are: a greater stress on environmental concerns (O’Connor, 2008; Johnson, 2008), the Nano’s safety record (Riley, 2008) and financial implications of the Nano for Tata Motor’s
bottom-line (Johnson, 2008; Bellman, 2008). At the same time, noting the significant clout *The Times of India* has traditionally enjoyed in both the political and corporate spheres of India, especially in setting the agenda of mainstream news coverage in the country (Kohli-Khandekar, 2006), basing the thematic analysis on the newspaper is logical.

A completely different mode of data collection and data analysis might also be suggested. For instance, rather than a textual examination, researchers might choose to interview organizational members, journalists (in either the financial or mainstream media), investors and stock market analysts, workers at the company’s public relations agency, members of some independent NGOs producing industry reports on Indian CSR standards (such as Partners in Change or Tata Energy Research Institute), and so on. While data gathered from interactions with these social actors might show a more nuanced understanding of corporate responsibility, they are unlikely to yield an analysis as closely situated and locally contextualized as the textual analysis has provided. That is, it would then be difficult to link the gathered data expressly to the case study at hand, rather than a general overview of corporate responsibility. Importantly, it should be clear that this study analyzes the organization-authored reality and the corporation’s response to protests – it does not seek to examine the resistance against the organization by the land acquisition protesters at Singur. This is a matter that needs to be tackled in future research, and would conceivably require actual interviews with the protesters.

Finally, another limitation of this study might be constituted by the fact that my reading of the text(s) and resulting conclusions are mine alone, and have not been corroborated or confirmed by anyone either at the organization or at Singur or a witnessing journalist. Thus, a possible charge against this study is that of ‘confirmability’. In its defense, however, the study falls back on the tenets of social constructionism, which embraces the plurivocality of meaning associated with discourse, and sees compulsorily occurring variances in interpretation (Grant et al., 2004). As Allen (2005) notes, “all knowledge is historically and culturally specific… as humans rely on current ideologies to create social identity categories and their meanings” (p. 37). Hence, the knowledge and process of interpretation is likely to differ from situation to situation: an engineer at Tata Motors’ new plant in Gujarat is likely to
have a different opinion of events at Singur, compared to a landless sharecropper who protested the original factory, who in turn is likely to see things differently compared to someone from the area who was expecting to get a job at the Singur factory but whose aspirations were dashed when the company relocated, and so on and so forth. Thus, while social practices negotiate the meaning of social reality, social situatedness also determines the meaning associated with that reality. Important to works of social constructionism then is reflexivity, both in that the findings of such a study are in turn subject to a critical stance, and also where the researcher is clear about one’s situatedness in the analysis (Burr, 1995). Schwandt (2000) argues that qualitative researchers need to pay attention to the fidelity of phenomena, respect for the life world, attention to the fine-grained details of daily life, as well as the researcher’s own interests, motivations, aims, obligations and texts. Accordingly, I have emphasized my lived experience and background as a business journalist and public relations practitioner, so as to be faithful to the details of media release production, distribution and consumption explicated on in this study. My basic stance as a humanist, as someone who essentially believes in the accountability of organizations, the State and the media to the communities they impact, is as much relevant to this study, as is the specific method of analysis used.

Implications for Future Research

This study has interconnected implications for organizations, State governments/ agencies, the media, as well as the stakeholders and impacted communities of each. I will consider these, in the remaining portion of this chapter.

First, the study refuses to accept organizational ethics and corporate social responsibility theory only in terms of particular CSR activities of an organization. Rather, it views the normal business operations of a company through the lens of CSR theory and organizational colonization, to examine the claims of an organization that prides itself on being socially responsible. The case study at hand shows an intriguing situation where corporate social responsibility work by the company is normalized into its business operations – in fact, is seen to occur even before the actual establishment of the organizational project – and both company representatives and corporate literature suggest a structured/ institutionalized
version of CSR in use. Accordingly, the study broadens the scope of CSR theory by using it – and the different dialectical understandings of what corporate responsibility is – to study organizations. The CSR principles are seen to be exceedingly important in the reification and maintenance of the organization-preferred view of reality, even to the extent that dissident opinion is silenced.

In the second place, the dialectical approach of the study refuses to accept black-and-white versions of corporate social responsibility. That is, CSR is not a monochromatic ‘business case’ nor a stakeholder-based theory, it is not completely focused on charitable philanthropy nor is it entirely dependent on State-support. Rather, socio-historical and spatial contexts shape the meaning of corporate responsibility, so that various meanings may arise. Charity and donations are seen to be Gandhian in nature, though they are not, strictly speaking. Again, the expansionist, independent streak of business is often at loggerheads with the sentiment of State-support and State-driven corporate responsibility. Thus, corporate responsibility in the 21st century cannot be understood either through the lens of an ever-marching neoliberal global mantra, nor through localized and fetishized notions of traditional Indian culture; the appropriation, negotiation and refashioning of each must be recognized, since it is this dialectic that reflects actual lived experience. Accordingly, this study broadens our notions of CSR theory to a more global/ local context and a more fluid/ dialectical understanding.

Third, the study reveals an interesting relationship between the organization and the State. The role of the organization as political, despite its best efforts to not appear so, is highlighted through the Organization-State linkages in the study. On the one hand, this has implications for theorizing on the State – to what extent is the State to be considered political? At the end of the day, both organization and State are seen to be political agents, and yet the question arises as to whether we must differentiate between ‘politics’ and ‘political machinery’ as the organization seems to do, in the present study. That is, the organization seems to regard the State as the direct and complete representative of the community, beyond and above politicking, the political machinery, vote-catching exercises, and the like. Yet, the State’s political stance and interests come to the fore when its diktats are clearly protested by a sizeable chunk of the people it is supposed to represent.
On the other hand, the mix of globalization trends, corporate ambitions to make it big in the international arena, and State aspirations to move from emerging economy status to the ranks of the developed countries further problematizes the Organization-State relationship. The study’s dialectical understanding of globalization and CSR reveals the ambiguous relationship between Tata Motors and the State. While the two are clearly purported to be partners at some level, with the company building investment and employment in the state and the State extending special privileges to the organizational project, such as cheap land and training facilities for potential employees, theirs’ is also a relationship not immune to stress. The State needs to balance its own set of stakeholders: the urban financiers and political connections vis-à-vis the rural votes, and oftentimes the urban/rural relation is quite complex. Accordingly, favoring the organization-preferred reality is also a gamble and balancing act for the State. Thus, while studying the role of impacted communities in CSR, the role of the State needs to be looked at in greater detail.

The socio-historical context of being an ‘emerging economy’ is seen to arm organizations with added tools for the naturalization of organization-preferred reality, in the face of staunch opposition. The study showed instances where organizational reality was legitimized, on the basis of promises, aspirations, dreams and hopes, at a variety of levels – individual, regional, national and global. In the emerging economy context, the community- and nation-building ethic of corporate responsibility and corporate development are thus important strategies that may be utilized for organizational colonization of the life-world. For instance, by framing Tata Motors’ takeover of Jaguar and Land Rover as a victory over India’s once-colonial masters (TOI, 2008d), it becomes that much harder to oppose the company in other spheres as well – its corporate reputation has already been built as one hinged on nation-building and patriotism, and the dissident runs the risk thereby of appearing unpatriotic. Moreover, the study clearly showed a lop-sided approach by the organization in terms of stakeholder management, and the question that must be asked is: if organizations in emerging economies foster their role as nation-builders, then what kind of a nation do they see themselves building? And who gets excluded from this idea of the ‘nation”? The voice/silence dialectic examined in this study suggests a re-hash of the old urban-centric
modernization paradigm of development that ignores rural narratives and fosters technological dependence.

Fourth, the study serves to recalibrate the issue of organizational strategies against dissidence. Organizational communication scholars, like Clair (1998) and Deetz (1992, 2005), have done admirable work in this regard, as they identified some specific tactics used by corporations to Other and effectively ‘silence’ voices opposed to the corporation, or those that advocate an alternative view of reality. The tactics range from the personal to the institutional, as alternative views are progressively undermined as inefficient, misguided, wrong, or quite simply immoral. Several of these tactics were in attendance in the case study at hand. However, the study revealed another interesting tactic, which takes advantage of the emerging economy aspirations and socio-historical context of the case. Accordingly, dissidence is seen to be stamped out – or at least, attempts appear to have been made to do so – as not just anti-progressive, but also anti-national and anti-community. The protestor who marches at Singur for his/ her tiny patch of farmland not only misses the point that s/ he will be compensated with a new job, but in blocking progress for his/ her fellowmen (chiefly, those in the booming city close by) s/ he is acting in a way entirely biased and politically motivated. The infusion of politics and the charge of anti-national against dissidents thus need to be probed deeper in future research, especially in the emerging economy context. The implications of this tactic are evident even away from the developing world space, when considering the present global politics of economic nationalism and world-wide attempts to stem a global recession (see Samuelson, 2009). For instance, while sitting at the negotiation table for bailing out the Big Three Auto companies in Detroit, U.S.A., one might blame the representatives of the United Auto Workers for being not nationally motivated enough, or too selfish, since they put their vested interests (of financial security?) ahead of the Pro-America Big Auto – a charge that has actually been made by some rightwing politicians in the U.S. When seen through the light of Cloud’s (2007) skepticism about management-labor harmony, global recessionary trends portend more such instances where political arguments are made by organizations (and their champions) to ‘silence’ dissident views.
Fifth, the study has implications for the transformation of organizational discourse across channels and resources, and makes a strong case for other discourse analysis projects to attempt a similar multi-dimensional examination. Differences were observed in the emergence and appropriation of themes between the media releases and news coverage in the study. For instance, while the news theme of national progress through global footprint was stressed in many of the media releases, this was never the central message of a release – it always appeared as a quotation or a point of subjective modality – as it was in the news coverage. This shift in focus between the media releases and the news coverage may be partially explained because of the news media’s avowed interest on issues of prominence and greatest impact (Bender et al., 2009), which would focus more on these themes. In contrast, none of the news stories studied dealt squarely with the employment/training of the relatively unknown Singur locals, and mention of the protesters was also always linked to references of prominent politicians or company executives. At the same time, there was a clear convergence of themes and ideologies between the media releases and the news coverage – in that the organizational view of reality vis-à-vis corporate development as nation-building, the role of the State, the apolitical nature of the neo-capitalist organization, personal valorization and team cohesion, technological advancement and global accomplishments, among others, were lauded unproblematically by the news media. On the one hand, this testifies to organizational links and issues of access – for instance, if journalists are overtly dependent on access to corporate executives for their news stories, they will naturally be loath to antagonize them with negative coverage – while, on the other, it also speaks to perhaps a fundamental ideological convergence, that is, the media and the corporate world share a neoliberal stance. Accordingly, while examining organizational discourse in various texts, it becomes important to examine its transformation between/among those texts. Moreover, the influence of mediating agents should be kept in mind – for instance, that of public relations firms in the production and distribution of press releases. Future study should thus examine the relationship among organizations, public relations agencies, and media channels for an enhanced understanding of the communicative construction of organizational reality.
Finally, future research needs to engage directly with resistance to organizational strategies and the corporation-preferred view of reality in such situations. Such an approach is bound to expand the idea of resistance as well, beyond the traditional labor and feminist-oriented critiques of organizational hegemony, to a more nuanced and incisive analysis of resistance tactics in the 21st century (see Pal & Dutta, 2008). Importantly, it should be kept in mind that resistance may occur through several channels, and its scholarly examination may also progress along a myriad of paths – for instance, one may engage in direct interviews with alternative protesters (Pal & Dutta, 2009) or examine externally produced alternative media presenting their arguments (Mukhejee, 2009). However, resistance needs to be critiqued on its own head as well. It is not enough to merely present the strategies and tactics to resist organizational colonization; future research must engage with resistance and probe into its ongoing processes with a dialectical view of organization/society in mind, both showcasing its potential and exposing its inequities.

While the present study has accorded great importance to genre or structure – in terms of the normative media release style or the journalistic method of writing, say – it also highlights areas of discontinuity in the transformation of organizational discourse and the construction of social memory. Accordingly, the hope for social change lies in the deconstruction of such discontinuity and the examination of the frozen/fragmented images whereby organizational colonization is reinforced. Such a deconstruction thus implicitly views agency as being able to manipulate sites of discontinuity and learn from them, even as it adheres to a dialectical understanding of agency/structure (see Chapter 4). Such an understanding of resistance and organization, colonization and embeddedness, social responsibility and normal business operations, State and community, promises a most fruitful course of engaged scholarship.
EPILOGUE

A week after Tata Motors publicized its decision to relocate from Singur in West Bengal, leader of the Trinamool Congress and chief protagonist in the land acquisition protests, Mamata Banerjee, rushed to the nation’s capital, New Delhi, to meet with the President and the Prime Minister, to marshal support against West Bengal’s state government and Tata Motors. The fact that the company had directly blamed her for its departure from Singur arguably made her ‘anxious’ about her party’s future in the upcoming 2009 general elections. As The Times of India noted, “The accusations she hurled failed to fully mask Mamata’s anxiety over being painted as the reason why Tatas were forced to shift a project, which held the potential of generating thousands of jobs besides marking the industrial revival of West Bengal, to Gujarat” (TOI, 2008e). As it turned out, however, when the general elections came around in May 2009, Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress trounced the reigning Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the national media declared that her “high stakes gamble on Singur” (TOI, 2009) had paid off. It was time for “introspection” by the State, the media (Tewari, 2009) declared: on the one hand, the State had forcibly tried to acquire land from rural citizens rather than engage in a more peaceable transfer, while on the other, it had arguably ignored the poor economic plight of the vast Muslim community in rural Bengal. Failure to adequate represent its stakeholders meant that the State had lost a significant battle.

As for Tata Motors, reconciliation with the State and the community is clearly a complex process. In a news-interview, Chairman Ratan Tata admitted that he wasn’t sure “how much [of the protests at Singur] was the farmers' problem (and how much was political)”. While it would be easy to blame Big Business for its neglect of the common man, it would be better served however to consider the complexities of the situation. In the interview, Tata mused,

Who is the loser? Are the people really going to prosper, many of whom are below subsistence level?...What about the people who had aspirations for jobs? These are the questions that come to my mind. (Sen Gupta & Desai, 2008)

As for West Bengal? “We will do something, if the environment is conducive”, he said.
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Ladies and Gentleman, thank you for being with us on this memorable occasion. There are no celebrities at this function nor any dance routines. The center of attraction for this morning's event is the new Tata car which we are unveiling.

We're going to take you on a small journey. A journey that symbolizes the human spirit of change, the will to question the unquestionable, the drive to stretch the envelope.

Ladies and gentleman, I invite you to join me in this journey of innovation and evolution. The quest to lead and the quest to conquer. It is this quest that led to the first manned flight by the Wright brothers. Today, thousands of aircrafts travel the skies carrying millions of passengers across the globe in safety and comfort. The same quest for leadership and conquering new frontiers led to landing man on the moon, an unheard of and unbelievable achievement at that time.

Innovation and evolution led to the creation of a bicycle which the rider pedaled to move faster than walking. Later, innovation motorized the bicycle to create the motorcycle and the scooter, providing motorized transport for up to two persons. The ENIAC computer in 1945, considered among the highest powered at that time filled an entire room. Today, the power of that huge machine is exceeded in the personal computer that sits on our desks or in fact, that we carry as laptops in our briefcases.

There are solutions for most problems. The barriers and roadblocks that we face are usually of our own making and these can only be demolished by having the determination to find a solution, even contrary to the conventional wisdom that prevails around us, by breaking tradition.

Today's story started some years ago when I observed families riding on two wheelers, the father driving a scooter, his young kid standing in front of him, his wife sitting behind him holding a baby and I asked myself whether one could conceive of a safe, affordable, all weather form of transport for such a family. A vehicle that could be affordable and low cost enough to be within everyone's reach, a people's car, built to meet all safety standards, designed to meet or exceed emission norms and be low in pollution and high in fuel efficiency. This then was the dream we set ourselves to achieve. Many said this dream could not be achieved. Some scuffed at what we would produce, perhaps a vehicle comprising two scooters attached together or perhaps an unsafe rudimentary vehicle, a poor excuse for a car. Let me assure you and also assure our critics that the car we have designed and we will be presenting to you today will indeed meet all the current safety requirements of a modern day car.

Of late, when it became known that we will in fact be making such a car, the attention has moved to questioning the pollution it would create. Let me again assure those who have concern for the environment that the car we present to you today will meet all current legislated emission criteria and will have a lower pollution level than even a two wheeler being manufactured in India today.

Concerns are also now being expressed about the congestion that could be caused by the existence of our small car in large numbers. I believe this needs to be put in the right perspective. There is no doubt that India is woefully behind its neighbours in infrastructure. The government is endeavoring to address this situation with its new road policy. Looking ahead, five years from today, were we to produce and sell 5,00,000 small cars every year, we would then, at the end of five years constitute approximately 2.5% of all passenger vehicles in the country. This could hardly be considered the nightmare of congestion that is being raised today about our new small car.

Despite what the critics said, despite what our antagonistic did, we pursued our vision to give India an affordable people's car that had not been produced anywhere in the world. In fact, a car that most people said could not be manufactured for that kind of price. But we never took our eyes of our goal. Today we
will present what a young group of engineers and designers gave their all, for about four years to achieve.

Anyway I have said enough ladies and gentlemen, now I give you the new car from Tata Motors, the people's car that everyone has been waiting for.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for being with us. We are very pleased to present these cars to you today. They are not concept cars. They are not prototypes. They are the production cars that will roll out of the Singur plant later this year. And these will come in several variants. You have today on the stage one basic car or standard car and two deluxe cars which will have air conditioning also. Yes there will be air conditioning.

This is been referred to as one man's dream and indeed it was. But it took a tremendous amount of team work to convert this or translate this into reality. And I think it would be but fair and fitting to recognize and acknowledge the achievement of young group engineers who undertook the challenge for four years and great sacrifice to themselves and produced this car. I'd like to acknowledge Girish Wagh who headed the team. Girish, would you come up here? And some of his team members who are here with him. There are close to five hundred people in the team and obviously not all of them can be here, so on behalf of all of us we would like to acknowledge, on behalf of the company what the team has been able to do. All five hundred of them. I would also like to ask Ravi Kant (Managing Director, Tata Motors Ltd.), Prakash Telang (Executive Director (Commercial Vehicles), Tata Motors Ltd.) and Rajiv Dube (President (Passenger Cars), Tata Motors Ltd.) to join me up here at this time.

Let me say something about the car. The cars you see, as you can, are four door, they will seat four to five persons, they are powered by a 33 horse power, 624 cc engine. In size, externally it is approximately 8% smaller, bumper to bumper, than the Maruti 800. But internally it is 21% larger in passenger space. Fuel economy in terms of mileage, it'll be around 20 kilometers per liter or approximately 50 miles a gallon.

As I said earlier, much has been said about emission and much has been said about congestion and safety. Let me address the emission and the safety issues. In emissions as I mention, the car has, in fact passed the full frontal crash test that is required in this country (India). But it is also been designed to pass the offset and the side crash which is required internationally. So that the car can, in fact, be sold internationally.

In terms of pollution, it today confirms to Bharat III and in fact today with this engine will indeed meet Euro IV which is not yet required in this country (India).

We decided we'd call it Nano because it connotes high technology and small size. So we stayed with the name.

Finally all of you have been conjecturing about the price. And since we commenced this exercise four years ago, we are all aware that there has been a very steep increase in input prices of steel, tires and various and sundry other inputs. Bearing all this in mind, I would like to announce today that the standard car will in fact have a dealer price of One Lakh Only (100,000 INR), VAT and transport being extra. Now having said that, I just want to say that that is because a promise is a promise and that's what we would like to leave you with.
APPENDIX B:

TEMPLATE OF ANALYSIS SHEET FOR EACH MEDIA RELEASE

Title/ headline of media release:

Date of release of media release:

1. Social construction:
   - Who is the narrator/voice in the text?
   - Who is being narrated to?
   - Use of ‘rhetorical schemata’: Mainly - announcement, progress report, or speech.
   - Use of ‘themes’:
     - Nominalization:
     - Keywords:

2. Pattern of interaction:
   - Acceptance of views:
   - Topic control:
   - Pre-set agenda:

3. Politeness: Towards the organization itself and its stakeholders.

4. Modality (degree of affinity with proposition):
   - How strongly does the producer adhere to a position in the text?

5. Dialectical ethos:
   - Technocrat vs. Humanist vs. Administrative:
     - Inherent paradoxes:
     - Intertextuality & interdiscursivity:
     - What markers of cohesion are used (implicit vs. explicit)?
**APPENDIX C:**

**MAPPING TEXTUAL ANALYSIS TOOLS WITH AGENT-CHARACTERISTICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Organization as Social Agent</th>
<th>Who is the narrator/voice in the text?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History, Heritage and Reputation</td>
<td>Who is being narrated to?</td>
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<td>Use of ‘rhetorical schemata’</td>
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<td>Use of ‘themes’</td>
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<td>Nominalization</td>
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<td>Keywords</td>
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<td>Metaphors</td>
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<td>Topic control</td>
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<td>Politeness</td>
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<td>How strongly does the producer adhere to a position in the text?</td>
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<td>Objective vs. Subjective Modality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intertextuality &amp; interdiscursivity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What markers of cohesion are used?</td>
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<th>Common Sense</th>
<th>Who is the narrator/voice in the text?</th>
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<td>Who is being narrated to?</td>
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<td>The Organization, the State and Nation-Building via Corporate Development</td>
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| **Apolitical Growth**                                         |
| Who is the narrator/voice in the text?                        |
| Who is being narrated to?                                     |
| Use of ‘rhetorical schemata’                                  |
| Use of ‘themes’                                               |
| Nominalization                                                |
| Keywords                                                      |
| Metaphors                                                     |
| Topic control                                                 |
| Pre-set agenda                                                |
| Politeness                                                    |
| How strongly does the producer adhere to a position in the text? |
| Objective vs. Subjective Modality                             |
| Technocrat vs. Humanist vs. Administrative:                   |
| Inherent paradoxes                                            |
| Intertextuality & interdiscursivity                           |
| What markers of cohesion are used?                            |

<p>| <strong>Delivering on Aspirations</strong>                                 |
| Who is the narrator/voice in the text?                        |
| Who is being narrated to?                                     |
| Use of ‘rhetorical schemata’                                  |
| Use of ‘themes’                                               |
| Nominalization                                                |
| Keywords                                                      |</p>
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FOOTNOTES

1 The office of the Chief Minister of a state in India is similar to that of the Governor in a U.S.
state.

2 It is ironic that Tata Motors eventually moved its Nano factory from Singur to… Gujarat.

3 Recall Waddock’s (2007) observation on the “dark side” of corporate citizenship: namely, the
more successful the corporate citizen, the worse its offenses are likely to be deemed.

4 Tata Motors Limited has an Executive Managing Director; the post is presently filled by Mr.
Ravi Kant.

5 The author worked in Mumbai, India, for two and a half years as a broadcast journalist, covering
the stock market and corporate news, and subsequently worked for a year in investor relations at a private
public relations firm. His designations in the media industry ranged from Trainee to Correspondent –
Business News. As Senior Executive – Investor Relations at the public relations firm, he was part of a
team that handled up to 14 corporate accounts.

6 It should be clear that since “discursive practices” also includes those of production, elements of
genre like the normative media release structure, examined in ‘The Media Release Structure’ in the
previous section of this chapter, are also important in this regard. Accordingly, while this section focuses
on the consumption/interpretation part of discursive practice, the normative structure of media releases
should also be kept in mind while weighing over the emergent themes in the news coverage.
Figure 1: The Tata Nano. Photo courtesy: Tata Motors website.
Figure 2: Tata Motors Chairman Ratan Tata at the unveiling of the *Nano* at Mumbai, India. Photo courtesy: The Times of India.

Figure 3: A demonstration by land acquisition protesters at Singur, West Bengal. Photo courtesy: The Evening Standard, U.K.
Figure 4: Workers leaving the construction site of the Tata Motors factory at Singur, West Bengal. Photo courtesy: MSN News.

Figure 5: Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, addressing a rally at Singur, West Bengal, against land acquisition for the Tata Motors factory. Photo courtesy: The Telegraph, U.K.
The End.