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VIRTUOUS DISCOURSE IN THE SPECIALTY COFFEE SECTOR: HOW SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES FRAGMENT PURSUITS FOR A SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN

by

HANES MOTSINGER

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VIRTUOUS DISCOURSE IN THE SPECIALTY COFFEE SECTOR: HOW SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES FRAGMENT PURSUITS FOR A SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN

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ABSTRACT

A diversity of public and private initiatives strive to address the human-environment challenges confronting the global coffee industry, including certifications like Fairtrade, direct trade sourcing models, and efforts led by NGOs. Research examines the outcomes of major certification programs and the private initiatives of corporations like Starbucks. Much less is known about the business practices of the small specialty coffee businesses that increasingly advertise sustainable business practices. Yet, their collective business practices likely influence the industry-wide efforts to achieve a sustainable supply chain. This research examines how small specialty coffee roasting and importing companies represent their socially responsible business practices through discourses of partnership, responsibility, and sustainability. Through critical analyses, I elucidate the limitations of voluntary, market-based solutions to human-environment

challenges and consider alternative avenues to achieve supply-chain sustainability, including greater institutional oversight and the possible inclusion of small companies in multi-stakeholder initiatives with shared governance structures.

DEDICATION

"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."
Arundhati Roy

To all who strive to build a brighter future.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Introduction

The global coffee industry touches millions of lives around the world. In Latin America, Africa, and Asia, small farmers grow coffee to be sold to international markets. At the opposite end of the supply chain, coffee roasters purchase green coffee beans, roast them, and sell those beans to consumers in major markets like the United States, Japan, and Europe. In between, mills, exporters, importers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other public and private institutions influence how coffee is grown, processed, shipped, sold, and regulated.

The coffee industry supports people's livelihoods around the world, but like other agricultural industries, it is fraught with social, economic, environmental, and political challenges. Most of these challenges manifest in coffee-producing countries. For example, traditional coffee forests in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia are losing their biodiversity due to pressures to expand coffee production and establish more sun coffee plantations—farming systems characterized by intensive agricultural practices, like heavy pesticide and fertilizer use, mechanization, and the destruction of rainforest canopies (Haggar et al. 2013, Solér, Sandström and Skoog 2017). Climate change is threatening the ability of growers to experience consistent harvests due to changing precipitation and temperature patterns (Laderach et al. 2011). Moreover, many coffee growers and pickers continue to receive low wages due to volatile commodity market prices, inconsistent demand, and limited regulation of market dynamics (Fischer 2017).

Over the past twenty years, a variety of public and private initiatives have tried to address the challenges confronting the global coffee sector. These include Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) like Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, and Smithsonian Bird

Friendly (Muradian and Pelupessy 2005, Ponte and Cheyns 2013, DeFries et al. 2017); direct trade sourcing models that claim to provide higher price premiums to growers and more social, economically, and environmentally responsible sourcing practices (Latta 2014, Borrella, Carrasco-Gallego and Mataix 2015, MacGregor, Ramasar and Nicholas 2017); and recently, efforts led by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) like Conservation International (CI) and the Global Coffee Platform (GCP) to build multi-stakeholder initiatives that leverage resources and help facilitate supply chain sustainability for the entire coffee sector.

Generally speaking, these initiatives are market-based approaches to sustainability that emerged alongside neoliberal economic policies in the early 1990s. In the coffee sector specifically, neoliberalism forced market deregulation and the dissolution of state oversight in coffee-producing countries around the world, opening the door for private stakeholders to take a leading role in governing supply chain dynamics through market-based approaches to supply chain sustainability (Ponte 2002a, Wilson and Post 2013, Jaffee 2014). Today, the majority of VSS and other private sustainability initiatives in the coffee sector—as well as other global commodity chains like bananas and chocolate—represent market-based approaches to supply chain governance, a common affect of neoliberalism's hollowing out of state regulation (Guthman 2011, Bowen 2015).

As these market-based initiatives have taken hold in the industry, "sustainability" has become a mobilizing buzzword in the global coffee industry. A 2016 report commissioned by the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA), the GCP, and the Sustainable Coffee Challenge (SCC) revealed that in 2015, for example, the global coffee industry spent an estimated $350 million U.S. dollars (USD) on sustainability initiatives in coffee-producing regions (Steemers 2016). These programs provided trainings related to climate smart agriculture and coffee lands regeneration, infrastructure development, financial management, and access to social programs like education and healthcare. In 2017, the SCA hosted its first sustainability conference, AVANCE, in Guatemala. This event brought together actors from across the industry to evaluate existing sustainability initiatives across the supply chain and discuss how these efforts could be scaled up to further address the human-environment challenges confronting the industry.

These efforts exemplify the sustainability efforts undertaken by major industry associations and companies; yet, a quick perusal of small specialty coffee business' websites reveals that sustainability has also become a key a concern among smaller players in the industry. BeanFruit Coffee Company in Pearl, Mississippi states on their website, for example, "we understand that there are farms that don't meet the criteria of other [sustainability] certifications but provide their workers with many benefits including fair wages. Our focus is sustainability not certifications." Similarly, Corvus Coffee Roasters in Denver, Colorado writes, "the search for excellent coffee is the search for farmers who consistently produce quality coffee because of a strength in their character. We build relationships with these men and women, visit their farms, and invest in their success […]"

Countless small and medium-sized specialty coffee businesses promote similar messages and initiatives on their websites and packaging materials. They market business practices that improve grower livelihoods, protect areas of biodiversity in coffee producing regions, and produce higher quality, artisanal coffees (Lewin, Giovannucci and Varangis 2004, Borrella et al. 2015). They advertise donations to non-profits, infrastructure investments in coffee-producing countries, seasonal purchasing of coffee beans, and long-standing relationships with growers in countries around the world. In the case of direct trade business models and firm-led development projects, many companies also subvert the accountability structures of certifications like Fairtrade and take the responsibility of finding solutions to social, economic, and environmental concerns into their own hands.

While corporations like Starbucks have highly visible sustainability commitments and have been researched and critiqued extensively (Macdonald 2007, Elder, Lister and Dauvergne 2014), significantly less is known about the sustainability discourses and practices of smaller specialty coffee businesses. Because there is no centralized governance entity in the specialty coffee sector that regulates businesses practices, businesses are often able to develop, advertise, and pursue any number of social responsibility causes. While some of these efforts result in positive outcomes for some coffee producers, the paucity of regulations and guidelines means that small companies' private initiatives may result in unintended consequences across the supply chain and derail coordinated industry-wide efforts to address lingering human-environment challenges. As efforts grow in the industry to integrate private firm-led initiatives and leverage resources like the estimated $350 million invested in sustainability in 2015, it is critically important to understand the role small businesses may play in moving the industry towards greater supply chain sustainability. This is especially true in the United States' coffee market where small specialty coffee businesses with less than 3 locations dominate the specialty sector—accounting for 55% of all specialty coffee businesses.

In this qualitative research study, I build on existing scholarship about sustainability in the coffee sector and corporate social responsibility, examining how small specialty coffee roasting and importing companies in the United States represent themselves as bearers of morality and social good through discourses of partnership, responsibility, and sustainability. I consider how small companies' social responsibility practices may contribute to industry wide calls to make coffee the first sustainable agricultural commodity in the world. Based on open-ended interviews with specialty coffee professionals and experts, and analyses of secondary materials, I illustrate how sustainability discourses create symbolic capital for coffee companies, yet fail to systematically address the human-environment challenges that persist in the industry. Through this critique, I "demystify such virtuous language" (Kirsch 2016: 63) and elucidate the potential limitations of market-based solutions to social, economic, and environmental injustices. Building on this critique and institutional analyses of supply chain management, I also consider alternative avenues to achieve supply-chain sustainability, including greater institutional oversight, shared governance, and the emergence of multi-stakeholder initiatives that integrate public and private interests towards common sustainability goals.

While this research is fundamentally grounded in the specialty coffee sector, lessons from this research apply to other global commodities like bananas, cocoa and tequila. In these industries, too, private, market-based standard setting continues to regulate social, economic, and environmental market outcomes. These initiatives strive to fill in the regulatory shortfalls of state governance, yet as this research reveals, they often fail to systematically address social, economic, and environmental injustices. Thus, this research reiterates the limitations of private standard setting initiatives in global commodity chains, with an emphasis on small and medium sized enterprises. Moreover, I consider the evolution of institutions and governance in global commodity chains and the emerging movement towards multi-stakeholder initiatives and collective action. I argue that the specialty coffee sector may be approaching a turning point where networked governance structures may help mitigate the unintended consequences of private sustainability initiatives and bring centralized governance back into the process of regulating supply chain dynamics for social, economic, and environmental sustainability. I argue that by moving away from market-based standard-setting processes and towards networked governance, institutional regulation, and collective action; evolving institutional ecosystems—to include regulatory trade associations and multi-stakeholder initiatives—may help facilitate new trade environments and values that are better equipped to address the diverse human-environment challenges routinely confronted within global commodity chains.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Establishing sustainability as a business concern

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (41). Commonly referred to as the "Brundtland Report," this document alerted the world to the challenges of maintaining economic development at its current state while safeguarding natural resources and environmental integrity for future generations. The Brundtland Report led to the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, setting sustainability as a core concern among public and private institutions. The MDGs fostered concern and action around issues like poverty, gender inequality, and environmental degradation in the world's least developed countries. Over 15 years, between 2000-2015, significant progress was made towards achieving the MDGs, but human-environment challenges continued to afflict communities around the world.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly published "Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," announcing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means to fulfill the unmet goals of the MDGs and establish sustainable development as a priority of all countries. The SDGs guide actions to address lingering social, economic, and environmental challenges—the so-called triple bottom line of sustainable development (Sachs 2012). They also strive to foster peaceful and inclusive societies and forge global partnerships for sustainable development that respond to the needs of the world's most vulnerable populations.

Since the release of the MDGs and more recently, the SDGs, corporations have increasingly contributed to development goals like poverty reduction, social inclusion, and environmental conservation, considering the triple-bottom line of sustainability in their business practices (Jenkins 2005, Frynas 2008). In diverse global industries—from oil to mining to agriculture—corporations have taken on an ever-larger role as proponents of sustainable development and socially responsible business, launching a diversity of social, economic, and environmental initiatives in the name of promoting more sustainable communities.

Critics of corporate involvement in sustainability argue that businesses' use of buzzwords like sustainability are often representative of "strategically deployable shifters"—virtuous phrases that allow corporations to talk about diverse, self-interested business practices as if they were talking about the same thing (Kirsch 2016). These types of phrases, they argue, overshadow the ways in which corporate practices continue to produce social injustices, environmental degradation, and economic marginalization in communities around the world. Proponents of corporate involvement in sustainability, on the other hand, believe that "by following socially responsible [and sustainable] practices, the growth generated by the private sector will be more inclusive, equitable and poverty reducing" (DFID 2001 quoted in Jenkins 2005: 525), and contribute to social inclusion, environmental protection, and economic opportunity.

Regardless of perspective, both critics and advocates commonly acknowledge that corporate involvement in sustainability exemplifies a shift towards "neoliberal governmentality" (Guthman 2011: 18), where market-based tools like consumer choice, private standard setting, and corporate social responsibility are promoted as effective solutions to human-environment challenges. Significant critical inquiries consider whether or not these types of tools have the power to address the systematic injustices and inequalities that continue to confront communities around the world, but limited research offers possible solutions to the limitations of market-based solutions to sustainability challenges (Guthman 2011, Dolan 2010, Blowfield and Dolan 2014, Levy, Reinecke and Manning 2016).

In this research, I further consider the opportunities and limitations of market-based approaches to supply chain sustainability by focusing on the practices of small companies in the United States' specialty coffee sector. I conceptualize the sustainability initiatives of small specialty coffee businesses as corporate social responsibility and consider how discourses of sustainability validate businesses' reputations and enhance marketing opportunities, yet also conceal organizational barriers to implementation and the unintended consequences of project implementation (Dolan 2010, Blowfield and Dolan 2014, Dolan and Rajak 2016, Kirsch 2016).

I also move beyond simple critique, considering how evolving institutions like trade associations and multi-stakeholder initiatives may help forge an alternative to market-based approaches to sustainability. I raise important questions in this discussion, including how new institutional ecosystems and regulatory bodies may 1) guide and regulate small businesses' sustainability practices in the future, and 2) forge collective action and shared governance structures in pursuit of democratically identified, measurable sustainability goals. Through these inquiries, I advocate for better understandings about how trade associations, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and shared governance structures may push against the current dominance of private initiatives in governing supply chain dynamics and in exchange, reassert an institutional, state role in forging a more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable future.

2.2. Sustainability and Social Responsibility in the Coffee Sector

In the early 2000s, the global coffee market experienced a devastating crisis: the coffee commodity market crashed, leaving coffee farmers receiving as little as $0.50 USD per pound of green coffee beans (Ponte 2002b, Ponte 2004). This event forced many smallholders to abandon their coffee plantations for other economic opportunities. For those who chose to remain in the industry, historically low prices meant unstable livelihoods and further socioeconomic marginalization.

The deregulation of the coffee market created by the dissolution of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) and other neoliberal economic reform policies, and the subsequent crash in prices, sparked a concern among private entities about the proliferation of socioeconomic injustices and environmental degradation in the global coffee industry (Ponte 2002a). Fairtrade International (FLO) responded to the crisis by launching the Fairtrade certification program, the first Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) to enter the industry. By paying certified growers a stable price premium above the Commodity "C" market price, and incentivizing social programs and environmental protection, Fairtrade strived to create an alternative market structure that would support producers in their quest for better livelihoods (Mutersbaugh 2002, Dolan 2010).

As Fair Trade began to provide a more viable market structure to certified farmers, a number of other VSS emerged in the industry including Rainforest Alliance, Smithsonian Bird Friendly and USDA Organic. Major multinational corporations like

Starbucks and Nestlé also began to develop their own private certification programs in response to NGO pressure to develop more ethical and sustainable business practices (García-Cardona 2016, Rueda and Lambin 2013). In collaboration with Conservation International, for example, Starbucks' launched the C.A.F.E certification program to ensure consumers, investors, and other stakeholders in the industry that the company's sourcing practices were not harming coffee producers and their communities. These voluntary standards forged a regulatory governance structure in a market where government oversight of social, environmental, and economic practices had largely failed, illustrating the hollowing-out of state power and the proliferation of private governance and regulation in the neoliberal era (Giovannucci and Ponte 2005, Raynolds, Murray and Heller 2007, Auld 2010, Ponte 2004).

Today, VSS are likely the most well-known and readily adopted sustainability and corporate responsibility initiatives in the industry. As such, a broad body of literature critically examines the costs and benefits coffee producers receive for participating in VSS certification programs. Research on the economic costs and benefits of Fairtrade reveals a mixed bag of socioeconomic outcomes for coffee producers, with some growers realizing higher profits and better livelihoods while others remain trapped in cycles of poverty and low income (Rueda and Lambin 2013, van Rijsbergen et al. 2016, Bacon 2005, Perfecto et al. 2005). Similarly, research on the environmental outcomes of Smithsonian Bird Friendly and Rainforest Alliance certifications reveals a sliding standard of "shade certification" and environmental protection between the different programs (Jha et al. 2011, Buechley et al. 2015, Haggar et al. 2015, Caudill and Rice 2016). These studies argue that different forest compositions on coffee farms have varying effects on species diversity. This scholarship calls for a more consistent and transparent shade classification system that can be more easily understood by consumers, growers, and buyers in the coffee supply chain (Perfecto and Vandermeer 2015, Perfecto et al. 2005, Elder, Zerriffi and Le Billon 2013, Tscharntke et al. 2015). It also suggests that without more stringent, consistent standards across certifications, VSS may allow room for cooptation, market confusion, varying degrees of compliance, and insufficient progress towards supply chain sustainability.

Another body of literature related to sustainability in the coffee sector investigates the social and economic factors that determine farmers' participation in certification programs (Grabs et al. 2016, DeFries et al. 2017, Solér et al. 2017, Bravo-Monroy, Potts and Tzanopoulos 2016). These studies illustrate that farmers' often participate in sustainability programs due to the availability of financial resources, access to knowledge about the costs and benefits of participation, and farmers' positioning in the coffee supply chain. Importantly, Solér et al. (2017) reveal that the failure to certify increasingly results in a market disadvantage for uncertified coffee producers. This pressure to certify illustrates the buyer-driven nature of the coffee supply chain (Gereffi 1994). In this context, coffee producers' entry into the global coffee market is subjugated to the branding, marketing, and retailing practices of buyers in major consumer markets like the United States (Ponte 2002a). While consumers, roasters and importers demand sustainably produced coffee and sell it for high retail prices, smallholder farmers incur the costs of certification and routinely receive marginal economic gain for their participation. Moreover, due to a surplus in certified coffee, many certified growers are forced to sell their beans on the commodity market, earning significantly lower prices than those guaranteed by certification (Samper and Quiñones-Ruiz 2017). This inability to earn a high price for their certified beans traps growers in cycles of vulnerability and raises the question, who benefits from the proliferation of market-based sustainability standards in the coffee supply chain: producers, buyers and retailers, or consumers?

Due to the perceived shortfalls of certifications, a growing number of coffee companies have started adopting their own firm-led, private voluntary initiatives (PVIs) to address injustices in the supply chain (MacGregor et al. 2017). The most well-known PVI is likely "direct trade" (Latta 2014, Holland, Kjeldsen and Kerndrup 2016, MacGregor et al. 2017). Advocates of PVIs like direct trade argue that these types of programs may provide greater supply chain transparency and sustainable purchasing practices between coffee roasters, importers, and growers (Latta 2014, Borrella et al. 2015). Borrella et al. (2015) argue, for example, that direct trade may help transform the power imbalances of the coffee supply chain by forging long-term, collaborative relationships between buyers, growers, and consumers. MacGregor et al. (2017), on the other hand, offer a more skeptical view. They argue that while coffee roasting and importing companies use direct trade terminology to market ethical and sustainable sourcing practices, the legitimacy of direct trade is compromised because standards are self-determined within each business. As a result, it is often unclear whether or not PVIs serve roasters' product-oriented concerns about taste quality, conscious consumption, and marketing potential or long-term concerns about social, economic, and environmental sustainability issues. Moreover, MacGregor et al. (2017) argue that because no regulated definition of direct trade exists, coffee companies are able to market any number of business practices under the cloak of better business, adding obscurity to the already muddied landscape of sustainability initiatives in the global coffee sector.

These emerging critiques of PVIs point to the lack of a centralized governance entity in the specialty coffee sector and the continued failure of the sector to institutionalize best practice guidelines for social responsibility and sustainability. As this research suggests, limited regulatory environments may be enabling smaller companies to pursue their own private voluntary initiatives with few accountability structures and with limited knowledge about how their efforts may contribute to or hinder the pursuits undertaken by other public and private actors. While these types of critiques are mounting, little academic inquiry considers how small businesses' private sustainability practices may contribute to or hinder industry-wide efforts to achieve a sustainable supply chain. For example, while MacGregor et al. (2017) raise important questions about the potential problems with self-regulatory approaches to sustainability—arguing that standalone companies cannot be expected to have all of the skills necessary to monitor compliance with their own PVIs—this research focuses on leading direct trade firms and not on the sustainability discourses and coinciding practices of smaller companies. Given the proliferation of small specialty coffee roasting and importing businesses in the U.S. sector alone and the emergence of diverse private voluntary initiatives among these firms, research is needed to further understand the implications of small businesses' sustainability practices in the social, economic, and environmental dynamics of global commodity chains like coffee and likely too, cocoa, tequila, and tea, among others. In this research, I examine how the rhetoric of sustainability, partnership, and collaboration is used as a marketing tool and differentiation tactic in the specialty coffee sector. I argue that while these discourses may indeed relate to certain types of sustainability initiatives, they also serve to erase from public scrutiny the obstacles small firms face when they pursue firm-led initiatives on their own. I also consider how the highly competitive, individualized nature of sustainability initiatives may disrupt emerging efforts to leverage cross-sector resources for the achievement of collective sustainability goals. Lastly, I engage with recent calls for more structured regulatory entities in the coffee sector, considering how multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations may help foster more effective, long-standing solutions to sustainability issues by fostering shared governance structures that integrate competing firms and private interests around common, measurable sustainability goals.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

As described above, many actors in the global coffee industry express concerns about the human-environment challenges confronting coffee farmers around the world. Because governments in many coffee producing countries have been unable to effectively regulate, enforce, and foster socially, economically, and environmentally reponsible business practices, coffee companies have established programs to fill in the regulatory gaps left by insufficient government oversight (Wickert 2016). Coffee companies increasingly promise to protect fragile ecosystems and provide farmers with access to technical trainings, fair labor practices and wages, and social programs like education and healthcare. These initiatives—with their emphasis on providing access to social, economic and environmental resources in a largely unregulated industry—can be broadly conceptualized as corporate social responsibility (CSR).

In recent years, academic scholarship about corporate social resposibility (CSR) has proliferated. In this burgeoning field of inquiry, CSR has been defined in more than 30 ways (Dahlsrud 2008). For the purposes of this research, I adopt the definition of CSR offered by Spence and Bourlakis (2009: 291). The authors situate CSR in the context of supply chain management, defining CSR as "chain wide consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical and legal requirements of the supply chain to accomplish social (and environmental) benefits along with the traditional economic gains which every member in the supply chain seeks." This definition is appropriate in an industry like coffee where firms are striving to address human-environment challenges in the supply chain while also achieving economic prosperity.

A number of theoretical perspectives explain why businesses may be motivated to adopt CSR programs. The resource-based view of the firm, for example, argues that corporations can use CSR to acquire competitive advantage, market differentiation, and higher profits (Kotler and Lee 2005, Peloza 2009, Wilson and Post 2013). From the stakeholder perspective, corporations adopt CSR initiatives due to pressures from consumers, suppliers, investors, NGOs and other strategic partners (Maignan and Ferrell 2004, Agle, Mitchell and Sonnenfeld 1999, Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). The stewardship perspective argues that managers possess a sense of responsibility to do the right thing (Bansal 2003, Aguilera et al. 2007), while institutional theory (Campbell 2006, Campbell 2007) argues that businesses adopt CSR due to political, economic, and cultural institutional forces like state regulations, normative industry behaviors, and membership in professional associations.

A prominent theme that emerges across this literature is that CSR is often a part of business strategy (McWilliams, Siegel and Wright 2006). Whether this strategy is related to fostering consumer loyalty, garnering profits, establishing an ethical business mission, filling regulatory shortfalls, or responding to a range of institutional pressures, the fact that business strategy guides much CSR inquiry suggests that corporations have a vested interest in behaving in a socially responsible manner.

While the aforementioned literature makes a relatively convincing argument for the business case for CSR, a less prominent thread of scholarship asks, “is what’s good for business also good for people and/or the environment?” Hall et al. (2010) argue that CSR is increasingly seen as a panacea to address social, economic, and environmental challenges in communities around the world. Terming this the “panacea hypothesis,” the authors argue that this may be an overly optimistic assumption about the power of CSR to affect widespread socioeconomic change and environmental protection in communities.

As CSR programs take on an ever larger role in social and economic development in host communities (Merino and Valor 2011, Blowfield and Dolan 2014, Wickert 2016), Frynas (2008) and Hall et al. (2010) suggest that further research is needed to examine the capacity of private business firms to effectively conceptualize, implement, and govern CSR initiatives in the name of development. Echoing this argument, Moon (2007) argues that while many corporations are willing to respond to sustainable development issues, the lack of government involvement in such initiatives may hinder the potential effectiveness of such actions over time. Some scholars also argue that without formal institutions to hold corporations accountable for their actions, social responsibility may become nothing more than a rhetorical device to improve the reputation of the firm in the public sphere (Campbell 2006, Peng, Wang and Jiang 2008).

Critiques like these proliferate in the mounting "Anthropology of Corporate Social Responsibility" literature, which investigates what CSR does as it moves between board rooms, consumer markets, host communities, and back again (Dolan and Rajak 2016). Dolan and Rajak (2016: 3), for example, call for greater ethnographic scrutiny of CSR, writing,

> As more transnational corporations step in, so it seems, to fill the ethical void, as it were, left in the wake of neoliberal capitalism, there is a growing need to grapple with the myriad configurations of CSR and the expectations, contradictions and frictions the movement is generating.

Importantly, this critical scholarship considers whether CSR practices address existing inequalities or create new patterns of inequality and injustice by selectively determining who has access to the resources provided by corporate social initiatives and who does not.

While that majority of CSR research has examined and critiqued the practices of major MNCs like Starbucks, Shell, and Nike, significantly less is known about the business practices of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME). A growing body of scholarship emphasizes the importance of incorporating these types of businesses into CSR research (Jenkins 2006, Jamali, Zanhour and Keshishian 2009, Lee, Herold and Yu 2016, Wickert 2016, O'Connor, Parcha and Tulibaski 2017). Jamali et al. (2009) argue, for example, that SME's social responsibility initiatives may play an important role in developing countries because these types of businesses are often intimately tied to small communities and may possess more altruistic motives for adopting socially responsible business practices. They, along with Wickert (2016), argue that research on SMEs may provide new perspectives regarding the diverse factors that motivate corporate behavior and reveal important insights about the capacity of small businesses to fill in the regulatory gaps left by the proliferation of neoliberalism.

Further, Jenkins (2006) calls for more extensive CSR research on SMEs given the substantial role small businesses play in many economies and supply chains. He argues that while their achievements as individual firms may be negligable, the collective achievements of small firms may have major effects at global scales. Weltzien Høivik and Shankar (2011), through their empirical analysis of SMEs and CRS initiavites in Norway, build on this perspective. They argue that while SMEs may possess limited capacity to affect change as individual firms, their participation in cluster networks may contribute to the identification and pursuit of common CSR goals. Through the process of joining collaborative efforts, individual firms may strengthen their capacity to understand CSR challenges and act on them in meaningful ways.

While this research suggests that small firms' collective social responsibility programs may have positive influences, scholarship about the potential postive and negative aspects of small businesses' CSR remains limited. In an emerging line of inquiry related to industry-specific CSR (Beschorner and Hajduk 2017, Marques 2017, Berkowitz, Bucheli and Dumez 2017, Baumann-Pauly et al. 2017, Carrigan et al. 2017), Carrigan et al. (2017) examine how small jewellry firms become active participants in creating both positive and negative outcomes through their CSR efforts. Rather than viewing CSR as a blueprint strategy that is adopted by firms of all different shapes and sizes, the authors argue that small firms need tailored social responsibility strategies and mentorship networks that respond to their distinct organizational capabilities. Like

Weltzien Høivik and Shankar (2011), Carrigan et al. (2017) consider how shared practices may provide small firms with collective opportunities to foster supply chain transformation. Comprehensively, this body of literature argues that without greater attention to the corporate responsibility practices of small and medium-sized companies in particular sectors, understandings will remain incomplete about the potential implications of industry-specific CSR on supply chain transformation.

The importance of critical inquiries like these grow as more and more companies of varying sizes take on the role of governing and regulating the dynamics of complex supply chains like coffee. While existing scholarship closely examines mining (Rajak 2008), oil (Gardner 2016) and garment industries (De Neve 2016), limited attention has been given to the possible positive and negative affects of social responsibility practices among small companies in the specialty coffee sector. Building on critiques offered in Dolan and Rajak (2016), I examine how CSR discourses transform as they move from packaging materials and website blogs to real world practices. I identify points of disjuncture between what small coffee companies say they do in CSR marketing and what they experience in practice, raising questions about the capacity of small specialty coffee firms to address complex social, economic, and environmental challenges across the global commodity chains.

I also consider how the collective impact of small firms' social responsibility initiatives may rest on businesses' motives for adopting socially responsible behavior. Specifically, I examine how CSR competition may create new geographies of inclusion and exclusion within coffee-producing communities, contradicting narratives of inclusion, partnership, and equality. Through this ethnographic critique, I raise important questions about the potential benefit and harm done when small coffee companies' private social resposnsibility initiatives pursue self-interest and market differentiation over a holistic, collaborative approach to supply chain sustainability. I move away from a direct focus on coffee-producing communities, striving to understand instead the possible implications of consumer market competition on the pursuit of supply chain sustainabilitiy in the global coffee sector.

By focusing on a major consumer market, I also raise questions about the insitutional, regulatory ecosystem of global commodity chains. While we know at present that coffee is a buyer-driven market, I consider how emerging institutions and new governance platforms may be transforming supply chain processes. Building on institutional analyses of CSR (Campbell 2006, Campbell 2007, Garrido et al. 2014, Carrigan et al. 2017, O'Connor et al. 2017, Soyoung, Ben and Nefertiti 2017), I consider how multi-stakeholder initiatives, evolving institutional dynamics, and business associations may push against the self-interest and power of private firms in global commodity chains and promote and forge more sustainable supply chains through new trade values, better regulatory practices, and collective action across industries. As stated previously, while this research is grounded in the coffee sector—an industry that is looked upon as a beacon of sustainability initiatives—the findings of this research are likely applicable to other global commodity chains, especially those associated with high-quality, artisinal products like cocoa, tea, and distillates like tequila, mescal and sotol.

3. Methods

I adopted a qualitiative research design to critically examine small coffee roasting and importing businesses' sustainability discouses and related business practices. My analyses are based on a series of open-ended interviews with coffee roasting and importing professionals and industry sustainability experts, and analyses of secondary materials including websites, blog posts, packaging materials, and professional magazines.

In total, I conducted 11 interviews lasting between 50 and 90 minutes. Thirteen individuals participated in these interviews. Seven representatives of coffee roasting companies are included in the study, as well as three representatives of coffee importing companies, two industy experts, and one NGO executive director. While this number of participants is small, it is suitable for qualitiative methodological designs that pursue in-depth, detailed inquiry (Crouch and McKenzie 2006, Seidman 2013).

I selected roasting participants who represent businesses with a variety of sustainability commitments. Some research participants work for companies whose primary method of socially responsible behavior is participaton in VSS programs like Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance. Other participant companies develop and implement infrastructure development programs in coffee-producing countries, while others are solely committed to direct trade sourcing models. All roasting participants were either business owners or in managerial roles directly related to the company's sourcing practices.

I identified participant importing companies through interviews with roasting companies. Roaster participants suggested potential importing participants who I then invited to participate in the research. I also invited two industry experts, one from the Specialty Coffee Association and one from the Global Coffee Platform, to participate in this research. My last interview was with the Executive Director of an NGO working in coffee-producing communities to address social, economic, and environmental challenges. This final interview is not used in data analyses, but provided an interesting contextual perspective about the ways in which sustainability competition may produce unintended consequences for coffee-producing communities.

Between October 2017 and January 2018, I conducted all in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted in person or via telephone, depending on the participant's proximity to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I am located. I interviewed seven employees from four different coffee roasting businesses located in New Mexico. These interviews lasted between 50 and 75 minutes and were conducted in-person at the location of each coffee company. I then conducted in-depth telephone interviews with three employees from two different importers located in other parts of the country, two industry experts, and one Executive Director of an international NGO working in coffee-producing communities.

With consent from each participant, the interviews were recorded using either a hand-held audio recorder or the telephone recording App, Tape A Call Pro. My interview with the participant from the Specialty Coffee Association was not recorded due to a technological malfunction of the telephone recording program. During this interview, I transcribed notes and direct quotes using my computer. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to better ensure accurate representation of each participant. Participants were allowed to choose whether they would like to remain anonymous in the study. For participants who chose to withold their identities or the identities of their companies, I created an identifier to indicate the type of the business. Identifiers include “R” for roaster and “I” for importer, followed by a random three-digit number sequence; for example, R001, R002, I001, I002, etc. Table 1 below provides an overview of research participants.

	Participant’s Role in Business	**Business Identifier**	**Type of Business**	**Gender**
1	Coffee Director	R002	Roaster	F
2	Owner	R002	Roaster	F
3	Café Manager	R004	Roaster	M
4	Quality Control Manager	R004	Roaster	M
5	Owner	R003	Roaster	F
6	Sourcing Director	R003	Roaster	M
7	Roasting Manager	R001	Roaster	M
8	Director of Trade; General Manager	I001	Importer	F
9	Program Director	I001	Importer	F
10	Broker for East Africa and Brazil	I002	Importer	F
11	Sustainability Director	SCA	Business Association	F
12	North American Ambassador	GCP	Multi-stakeholder Initiative/NGO	F
13	Executive Director	NGO001	NGO	F

Table 1: List of research participants

In addition to interviews, I analyzed secondary materials from each company’s website and social media sites, acquiring textual and photographic data related to the company's sustainability practices. I also read industry magazines to glean additional information regarding industry-wide trends related to sustainability. I reviewed websites, blogs and packaging materials of more than 50 other specialty coffee roasters and importers in the industry to gather further insight about potential trends in the industry related to sustainbility marketing and corporate responsibility practices.

After transcriptions and secondary data analyses were complete, I identified major themes raised during each interview. I read through all transcripts to understand the general perspectives and major topics raised by each participant. I labeled passages of interest that related to the research topic, pulling out a number of key themes. I identified "connective threads" (Seidman 2013: 130) between the experiences of different participants and compared the responses of all interviewees around major categories. These categories included "sustainability practices," "company motivations," and "company challenges." Once I completed this coding process, I constructed narratives about 1) the motivation for socially responsible behavior and sustainability among research participants, 2) business practices related to sustainability commitments, and 3) the challenges of implementing CSR and sustainability initiatives. In the analytical chapters that follow, I use direct quotes from participant interviews to illustrate the three main findings of this research.

4. Results

Interviews with roasters, importers and sustainability experts in the U.S. specialty coffee sector and analyses of secondary materials revealed a variety of similarities and differences among the social responsibility discourses and practices of each firm. These moments of convergence and disjuncture provide insights about what CSR programs look like among small companies in the industry and how those efforts may contribute to or hinder industry-wide efforts to make coffee the first sustainable agricultural commodity in the world. Three important themes emerged from the data and guide my critical analyses in the following three sections. These include marketing sustainability and social responsibility; competition in sustainability; and opportunities for collaboration and shared governance through multi-stakeholder intiatives and business associations.

4.1: Marketing Sustainability in the Specialty Coffee Sector

In the specialty coffee industry, company websites and packaging materials are routinely marked by statements proclaiming longstanding relationships with farmers, commitments to ecologically sound agriculture, and the pursuit of business practices that ensure producers and buyers alike reap economic benefits from buying and selling coffee. Companies routinely use buzzwords like “sustainability,” “direct trade,” “partnerships,” and “collaboration” to convey ethical business missions to the public. Used alongside photographs of distant landscapes and coffee farmers, these communication strategies represent companies as bearers of opportunity and collaboration and shrink the vast geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural distances that often exist between producers and consumers.

In this section, I critique how small specialty coffee roasting and importing companies communicate responsible business practices and sustainability commitments through organizational websites and packaging materials. Paired with an examination of participant interviews, I reveal moments of disjuncture between what participant companies share with the public in marketing materials and what they experience in practice. By examining these moments of friction between what small firms communicate publicly and what they experience privately, I reveal some of the unique challenges small firms may face in effectively conceptualizing and implementing certain types of social responsibility initiatives. Yes, web statements, packaging materials, and blogs often do reflect concrete actions, but they also obscure the complexities some small firms face when striving to comply with their sustainability commitments.

I argue that these moments of discord are likely reflective of "aspirational talk," as defined by Christensen, Morsing and Thyssen (2013). The authors write, "the ways organizations talk about themselves and their surroundings are not neutral undertakings, but formative activities that set up, shape, reproduce and transform organizational reality" (375). They go on to state,

> We should not a priori disregard *aspirational talk* […] as something superficial or detached from organizational practice […] even when corporate ambitions to do good vis-á-vis society do not reflect managerial action; talk about such ambitions provides articulations of ideals, beliefs, values and frameworks for decisions—in other words, raw material for (re)constructing the organization (376).

I argue that the proliferation of sustainability discourses suggests that the specialty coffee sector may be ripe for the establishment of social responsibility best practices by industry associations like the Specialty Coffee Association. While I will cover this topic in more detail in section 4.3, I introduce how these insitutional initiatives may help standardize and regulate business practices towards common sustainability goals, push against corporate self-interest, and encourage small firms to integrate their commitments with the efforts of entities with greater organizational capacity and resources (Campbell 2006, 2007).

As I mentioned previously, specialty coffee companies advertise a diversity of approaches for enacting sustainable, socially responsible business practices. These include buying Fairtrade, Organic and Rainforest Alliance certified coffees, among others; donating a portion of company profits to NGOs; implementing development projects in coffee producing communities; and launching "direct trade" sourcing models as a way to better ensure responsible sourcing practices. Among research participants, R002's website highlights the financial contributions they make to NGOs working in coffee-producing countries. They state that these contributions help fill in the regulatory shortfalls of existing governments and institutions, pointing to the ways in which private CSR initiatives are believed to be a tool to provide oversight in a largely unregulated market (Muradian and Pelupessy 2005, Reinecke, Manning and von Hagen 2012, Ponte and Cheyns 2013). Illustratively, R002's website states:

> We have always included the prosperity and well-being of coffee producers among our top business goals. Since our earliest days, we have supported coffeeland NGOs […] these projects help fill in the gaps between what producers need and what they have […]

R002's packaging further promotes this narrative, stating, "Our job is to conscientiously source the best green coffees in the world and roast them by hand with the care and professionalism they deserve […] This is not anonymous coffee […]."

R002's proclamation that their coffee is not anonymous suggests relationships and business partnerships with coffee producing communities, a common feature of specialty coffee marketing. R003, another participant company, further articulates this common narrative:

> We build relationships with our coworkers on the coffee farms and conduct our business directly with them. You get better coffee and they are treated fairly, as partners and as friends. 10% of all profits go directly to supporting projects benefitting our coworkers.

R003 conveys images of collaborative relationships with coffee producing communities. They also market a more direct, do-it-yourself approach to CSR and sustainability than that advocated by R002. Rather than donating to NGOs like R002, R003 markets a commitment to creating development projects with producer communities. In an online blog, for example, R003 tells a story about working with a community in Ethiopia to develop a water infrastructure project that helps provide clean water to community residents. The blog publicly announces an organizational goal to support a specific community through an infrastructure development project; however, it does not make public the ways in which the company has struggled to implement the project over the past year. This points to the ways in which CSR marketing is both rhetorical and performative (Banerjee 2008), yet also cannot be “dismissed as mere cosmetic greenwash” (Levy et al 2016: 365). I will return to this point below.

Indeed, all roaster participant websites in the research study convey narratives about “procurement with a conscious” (R001) and love for the “the hands that produced and plucked each ripened cherry” (R004) between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. This trend continues among importing companies. For example, I001’s website states,

> [Our] mission is to support coffee producers by providing market access, in addition to collaborating on development projects, gender equality initiatives, harvest finance, and quality improvement programs. […] We believe that farmers should earn fair wages and helping to build community should be part of every business […]

Web statements like these emphasize extensive relationships with farmers and intensive collaboration on development projects that provide critical resources to coffee growing communities. I001's statements exemplify the ways in which some coffee companies increasingly see themselves as architects of change and stewards of social good (Banerjee 2008, Rajak 2008).

Additional examples abound across the industry, illustrating the ubiquity of certain buzzwords in the sector's marketing campaigns. For example, the following statement is included on the packaging of 1000 Faces Coffee Roasting Company in Athens, Georgia: "1000 Faces is a coffee roaster, merchant of change, and voyager of the agrarian spirit. We travel to countries of origin and establish relationships with producers to ensure the integrity of our coffee." Similarly, Participant company R004's website captures this communicative practice perfectly:

> The coffee in each bag is an extension of our love. Our love for you, the coffee and the hands that produced and plucked each ripened cherry. It's our hope that in making [us] a part of your morning, we can bring the ends of the earth to your kitchen."

Through discourses of empowerment, seed-to-cup, partnership, fairness, and sustainability, coffee companies market relationships of trust with producers as an essential component of the company's socially responsible business practices. By narrating experiences of shared meals, collaborative partnerships, and longstanding relationships with coffee-growing communities, coffee companies cast their businesses in a light of relationality that bridges the gap between coffee companies in the U.S. and coffee producers in remote communities around the world. Marketing statements like these forge imaginary connections between consumers and producers, building a moral economy in which "intensely 'local' narratives of coffee-growing communities and their farming practices are transported to distant global markets, building a [relationship] between producers and consumers" (Goodman 2004: 9).

With no clear definition of what "direct trade," "partnership" or "sustainability" means to different companies across the industry, specialty coffee businesses also possess the power to market any number of sourcing and social responsibility practices under the cloak of morality and ethics (Reinecke et al. 2012, Kirsch 2016, MacGregor et al. 2017). These marketing messages tell us little about how business practices may be transforming the unjust ways in which the global coffee market often operates; yet, they grant coffee companies the privilege of representing themselves as relatively autonomous change agents with the organizational capacity to transform many of the injustices that continue to plague the industry. This lack of a transparent, consistent definition of sustainability and CSR in the specialty coffee sector likely benefits companies in the pursuit of profits. For example, by inviting potential customers to "join the effort" (I001) in supporting distant communities through the purchase of certain types of coffee, coffee companies make a call to consumers to make purchases that matter. Termed "Brand Aid" by Ponte and Richey (2014), this marketing practice encourages consumers to buy certain commodities as a means to enable development in distant communities. By building imagined bridges and affective relationships between consumers here and farmers there, consumers are assured that their coffee is not anonymous and that it must be doing good, *somewhere.*

My interviews with research participants revealed, however, that sustainability marketing often covers up a variety of social, economic, political, and environmental dynamics that occassionally impede how sustainability initiatives play out for companies, communities and individuals at opposite ends of the supply chain. This highlights the possible limitations of market-based solutions—like conscious consumption and ethical marketing—to affect systematic transformation of injustices and inequalities. This is exemplified by my interview with R003.

During our interview, the company owner described her motivations for wanting to establish a water infrastructure project in a coffee producing community in Ethiopia. She said,

> The coffee industry can actually be pretty ugly and pretty bad for people […] I really want to do what's right by them […] if we can help them live a little bit of the better lifestyle […] I am more than happy to do that. Like I said, I'm a mom. These people have families and I want their kids to be able to get an education, I want their families to eat healthy food, I want them to have access to health care. That's what I want for my children; I want that for their kids, too.

This statement, as well as the roasters' packaging materials, points to an organizational commitment to social responsibility that is based on a moral imperative to do good. It paints a "visionary picture" (Christensen et al 2013: 373) of the organization, publicly representing the goals the company hopes to fulfill through CSR practices. As the interview progressed, however, the owner and the company's sourcing manager revealed the challenges small businesses may confront as they strive to implement development projects like this across vast spatial and cultural distances (Banerjee 2008, Carrigan et al. 2017).

As we were sitting around their dining room table talking about this project, the company's sourcing director, sighed and looked at the company's owner. He said, "I don't think I told you about the phone call this morning." He went on to explain how he had received a phone call from the Ethiopian community where the water infrastructure project is currently being development. During the phone call, he was informed that all of the equipment for the project had been stolen for a second time since its inception, resulting in a loss of $5,000 worth of project materials.

The frustration on his face was tangible as he expressed annoyance at the fact that "people [in this community] have stolen $5,000 worth of shit." While both participants repeatedly noted that this project was conceptualized in collaboration with community leaders, this example suggests that some community members may not see this project as a priority. Moreover, because R003 only visits this community on average once per year, there is little organizational capacity to oversee project implementation. This case suggests that in the context of small companies, development projects may be better left to international development agencies, governments, or coalitions of actors with greater capacities to effectively develop, implement, and monitor projects across time and geographical distances (Frynas 2008).

Similar moments of friction exist for other participant companies in the study. R004, for example, markets a direct trade business model to customers, suggesting how long-term partnerships and paying higher prices to farmers can benefit both farmers and the coffee company's quest for quality. In our interview, both company participants articulated the challenging, cumbersome process of pursuing direct trade as a small company. One interviewee indicated how difficult it is to logistically pursue a direct trade business model as a small firm with limited staff capacity. He pondered,

> […] How do you get coffee off of these really remote farms, down mountain roads, get them to the holding stations, get them to the processing centers, ship them across the…? It requires a massive infrastructure to get this coffee to us and it's something that we'll never be able to handle on our own unless we become Starbucks or something.

In spite of these logistical challenges, the company continues to market direct trade on their organizational website and share stories and photographs from their trips to coffee-producing countries in Latin America. Through this process of adopting the language of direct trade in marketing and downplaying the obstacles the company has confronted in pursuit of this goal, R004 presents an unambiguous image to the public about the power of direct trade sourcing models to benefit both the roasting company in New Mexico and producer partners in distant coffee producing countries.

Building on this example, R004's roaster recounted a story of visiting a coffee cooperative in Latin America where he wanted to forge a direct trade relationship with the farmers of a specific microlot of coffee. After tasting coffees from the cooperative, he tried to purchase a specific coffee from a single farmer in the cooperative. The cooperative rejected his request, saying that this type of contract could create hostility among other farmers in the organization, potentially resulting in the destruction of the farmers' land or even murder or severe injury.

This story further encapsulates the challenges small firms may confront when they strive to pursue private social responsibility initiatives in foreign producer communities with complex social, economic, and political dynamics. The lack of knowledge about cooperative dynamics and the lack of direct trade guidelines in the industry likely prevented R004 from having the necessary foresight to avoid this situation. This points to a macro-level governance issue in the specialty coffee industry (Frynas 2008). While the desire to pay farmers a higher price through direct trade (R004) or pursue an infrastructure development project (R003) is well-meaning, without regulatory guidelines, mentorship, or best practices for certain types of business models, firm-led initiatives among small coffee companies may result in unintended consequences for producer communities and hinder industry-wide efforts to achieve a sustainable coffee supply chain (Mutersbaugh 2002, Macdonald 2007, Carrigan et al. 2017, MacGregor et al. 2017). I further consider what these regulatory processes may look like in section 4.3 below.

It is undeniable, however—as evidenced through participant interviews and industry research—that many specialty coffee companies are articulating and pursuing high ideals about social responsibility and sustainability. What these statements mean in reality is often unclear and at times amiguous. “Sustainability,” “partnership,” and “direct trade” are “strategically deployable shifters” that improve company reputations while overshadowing the nuance of what is meant by their usage (Kirsch 2016). Nevertheless, these terms often do correspond with a set of company practices that are undertaken in the name of equality, justice, and sustainability. Specialty coffee roasters and importers are donating to NGOs, striving to pay farmers higher wages, purchasing certified coffees, and trying to implement development programs in an effort to improve coffee grower livelihoods.

Ultimately, the prevalence of sustainability discourses in company marketing reveals an important lesson for the industry: yes, sustainability is on the minds of many and perhaps, better sector-wide mentorship and regulation could help small firms identify sustainability intiatives that fit within their organizational capacities, leading to long-term outcomes that supercede the short-term returns of compelling marketing.

As small coffee companies display their business pursuits on packaging labels and organizational websites, they open thesmelves up to critique from other industry and non-industry actors (Christensen et al. 2013). This provides the sector with a window of opportunity to foster critical dialogue about how sustainability and social responsibility should be defined, practices, and assessed, and how the private efforts of small firms may be better integrated into industry-wide pursuits of a socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable supply chain (Berkowitz et al. 2017, Beschorner and Hajduk 2017). While further research is needed to conclusively make the following statement, the marketing messages of small specialty coffee businesses in the United States suggest that the sector may be approaching a turning point where associations like the Specialty Coffee Association and multi-stakeholder initiatives like the Sustainable Coffee Challenge or Global Coffee Platform could promote best practice guidelines and baselines for sustainable business models (Campbell 2006, Campbell 2007, Baumann-Pauly et al. 2017, Berkowitz et al. 2017).

Sustainability commitments among small firms have publicly raised the issues of social, economic, and enviormental injustice in the industry and inspired questions about effective governance for a sustainable supply chain (Macdonald 2007). However, better mentorship and communication practices between small, medium, and large companies, NGOs, business associations, and other industry actors are likely needed to help mitigate the unintended consequences or inefficiencies of social responsibility among small companies (Frynas 2008, Grayson and Nelson 2013). With these types of resources, small firms may become better equipped to identify social responsibility initiatives that feasibly fit within their specific organizational capacitities and also, ensure that their marketing campaigns accurately reflect the successes and failures of their voluntary CSR initiatives.

As I will further discuss in the following sections, while CSR marketing campaigns in the specialty coffee sector may represent small actions that are undertaken to address human-environment challenges, their occasional successes are likely not enough to affect systematic change in the supply chain. As Adam Greene (quoted in Vogel 2005: 170) at the U.S. Center for International Business notes, CSR initiatives "are often 'drops in the bucket,' nibbling at the edges of major public problems. They are not the road out."

The disjuncture between how small businesses represent themselves in marketing and what they experience in practice reveals that this limitation is markedly true in the U.S. specialty coffee sector. As I will further discuss in section 4.3, perhaps collective action, networked governance, and the creation of institutionalized CSR standards may help take private businesses' CSR efforts to scale; address and mitigate their unintended consequences; and greatly expand the ad hoc impact businesses may achieve when acting alone in pursuit of sustainability goals.

4.2: Moral and Competitive Motivations for Social Responsibility

In the previous chapter, I examined companies' use of buzzwords like "direct trade," "partnerships," and "sustainable" in marketing and advertising campaigns. I argued that the ambiguity of these terms permits a variety of business practices in the name of sustainability and eschews the establishment of a coherent, guiding definition of sustainability and social responsibility within the industry. I illustrated how these phrases—and the ways in which they are portrayed in marketing—erase the inherent complexities of achieving empowerment, development, and sustainability in an industry fraught with human-environment challenges. I also argued that the proliferation of these types of marketing campaigns may suggest the emergence of an industry-wide opportunity to establish institutionalized standards for CSR practice.

In this chapter, I further consider the effects of social responsibility in the specialty coffee sector by analyzing participant companies' motivations for adopting sustainability and social responsibility practices. This critical analysis suggests that many small firms have a moral reason for adopting socially and environmentally responsible business practices. However, participants also reveal that sustainability can be a competitive, deceitful business in the specialty coffee sector. I argue that as everyone competes with one another for the most persuasive discourse of responsibility and sustainability, an ad hoc, fragmented approach to sustainability emerges that combats the potential effectiveness of a collaborative, sector-wide quest for a sustainable supply chain (Reinecke et al. 2012, Helou 2014, Levy et al. 2016).

During my conversations with research participants, I asked everyone why their company had decided to adopt a commitment to sustainability or social responsibility as a part of their business strategy and/or mission. Collectively, participants described two major factors at play in guiding this decision. First, participants voiced an altruistic, moral motivation to "do the right thing" and a sense of responsibility to support coffee farmers due to limited state oversight and governance in coffee producing regions (Jamali et al. 2009, Wickert 2016). They also articulated competitive motives, suggesting that social responsibility and sustainability is good for business and not always undertaken for the sole purpose of achieving supply chain sustainability (Yoon, Gürhan-Canli and Schwarz 2006, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen 2010, Peloza and Shang 2011).

Today, coffee companies of all sizes vocalize commitments to improving the livelihoods of coffee producers and protecting environments in coffee-producing countries. For many, including participants in this research study, these commitments are motivated by a sense of responsibility to fill in the regulatory shortfalls left by the dissolution of the ICA. R002's Coffee Director, for example, referenced the regulatory and governance shortfalls of governments in many coffee-producing countries as a motivation for donating a portion of the company's proceeds to NGOs. She said, "I would love it if governments could participate in social welfare and climate change, but since they're not, I guess we have to."

Today, coffee companies like R002 see themselves as responsible for addressing governance issues in coffee growing communities around the world, engaging in a diversity of actions in the name of fostering a more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable global coffee supply chain (Millard 2017, Wickert 2016). This sense of responsibility exemplifies how the onset of neoliberal economic policies facilitated the proliferation of private social responsibility initiatives among companies in diverse global industries, including coffee. As I will discuss, however, private social responsibility actions—especially those undertaken by small firms—are likely not able to play the coordinating, regulatory role once attributed to states and address systematic injustices in global commodity chains (Sharp 2006, Blowfield and Dolan 2014, Anstatt 2016).

Nevertheless, the majority of research participants expressed this sort of personal moral motive for adopting socially responsible business practices. R003's owner shared why she decided to get involved in a feminine hygiene project in Ethiopia:

> I think that there's actually right now room for all of us to do what's right by the people […] when I think of the girls that all those reusable feminine hygiene products have put in school—I have a teenage daughter, I would want her to be able to go to school and why should I not want that for these girls. I totally want them to go to school and have an education because all that's going to do is provide opportunities for their whole life […]

This personal motivation to support coffee communities is also reiterated by a Program Officer at I001. She described the story of how the company's women's coffee initiative began. After explaining how the initiative brings market access to women producers and empowers them by supporting community-led, grassroots development projects, she talked about the company owners' personal motivations for launching the initiative.

While the owners—a husband and wife team—were visiting coffee farmers in Peru, a group of women farmers and local organizations proposed a project that would help women sell their coffee and gain greater equity and clout in the global coffee sector. The husband shied away from the project, but the wife said, "I know exactly what to do with this. I don't think this is meant for you, I think this is meant for me!" Shortly after this trip, I001 launched a women's coffee project to empower women coffee farmers around the world by helping them gain access to the specialty coffee market.

A growing body of literature argues that small and medium-sized enterprises—like R003, R002, and I001—likely have notable personal and relational motivations for adopting socially responsible business practices (Jamali et al. 2009). For small businesses, maintaining relationships of trust with customers, suppliers, and local communities is likely essential to the companies' longevity. The owners of both I001 and R003 chose to develop social responsibility programs because of personal relationships with coffee-growing communities in other parts of the world. Both women also vocalized a sense of solidarity with women entrepreneurs in other parts of the world, further reflecting the prominent role personal relationships with coffee-producing communities may have in establishing small firms' motivations for adopting social responsibility commitments.

All participant companies described competitive motivations, too; illustrating the multifarious reasons small companies may choose to adopt socially responsible business practices. R002's Coffee Director stated, for example:

> My mother [company owner] has always conducted business in a really community-oriented way. That's like her personality. And it has been since before people really cared in coffee. And then people really started caring. And then we realized that our competitors were advertising what they were doing and then we were like, 'crap, we really have to do that' […] seeing our competitor bragging that they gave 10% back made us look at the books and go, 'oh my god, we gave 12% back last year.

This statement exemplifies the ways in which sustainability has also become a competitive business in the specialty coffee industry and is, at times, used as a differentiation tactic among competing firms (Ambec and Lanoie 2008, Lowitt 2011).

This was further emphasized by R001's Roasting Manager. During our interview, I asked him to reflect on the company's motivations for purchasing certified coffees. He said that while the company owner has always had a concern for social and environmental issues, placing Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance labels on their packaging helps them sell coffee.

He went on to discuss how the company's marketing of "procurement with a conscious" is intimately tied to market prices. In spite of the fact that R001's company expresses a long-standing commitment to sourcing certified coffee, he talked about how market dynamics and company expenses make it difficult for the company to consistently comply with their stated sourcing commitments. He also lamented how New Mexico, as a relatively low-income state, does not have the customer base to support higher-priced certified coffees. Due to the necessity to keep prices low in the city's dominant consumer demographic, the company sees itself as unable to fully achieve its sustainability goals and consistently source Fair Trade Organic coffees.

Similar challenges were described by I002. For many specialty coffee companies with good intentions, the global coffee commodity market strongly dictates compliance with organizational commitments to source sustainable, socially responsible coffees (Dolan 2010). While it is likely not true for all small businesses in the specialty coffee sector, this points to potential limitations of market-based motivations for CSR: "precisely because CSR is voluntary and market-driven, companies will engage in CSR only to the extent that it makes business sense for them to do so" (Vogel 2005: 4). Without changes to the commodity market structure or the creation of regulatory baselines that require specialty coffee buyers to pay prices that cover farmers' cost of production—at minimum—the industry will likely continue to confront an unsustainable supply chain that disenfranchises smallholder farmers around the world (Peng et al. 2008). In other words, ss long as the market and quests for profits continue to dictate compliance with sustainability initiatives, systematic change will likely continue to evade the industry.

Sustainability as a competitive, rivalrous sport was further detailed by I001's General Manager. She told a story about her experiences with greenwashing in the industry. When a prospective customer called looking for Fairtrade coffee, she told them the price for the coffee and the customer responded that they had been offered a signficantly lower price by another importer. Because her company consistently complies with the high standards of fairtrade and strives to pay farmers the price premiums they deserve, she knew that the lower alternative price her potential customer had been given was far inferior to what it should have been.

She went on express significant frustration with events like these saying, "that's really unfortunate that that's happening because it's making people criticize fair trade as a whole and I think that instead we should be finding ways to improve and close up the loopholes." Her concern about loopholes and greenwashing encapsulates the negative ways in which the competitive nature of sustainability and social responsibility in the specialty coffee sector may hinder progress towards an industry-wide goal to make coffee sustainable. Moreover, without a centralized governance entity to oversee the sector's diverse sustainability initaitives, events like this will likely continue to occur, watering down the potential ability of well-intentioned initiatives to foster systematic change.

In essence, greenwashing, cooptation, and the pervasive lack of accountability structures in the specialty coffee sector creates a environment where an everyone-for-themselves approach to sustainability can emerge. Some choose direct trade, some choose direct trade plus development, others launch their own certification-like programs, while others donate to NGOs and purchase certified coffees. Alarmingly, others—like the firm described by I001's General Manager above—claim to support certifications like Organic and Fairtrade while offering prices that are artificially low and incapable of providing farmers the price premiums promised through certification. These examples raise a critically important question for the industry: how is it possible to achieve supply chain sustainability when you have thousands of mismatched pieces trying to solve complex, dynamic sustainability puzzles in communities around the world?

While I do not wish to argue that small specialty coffee companies cannot provide tangible benefits to some communities through social responsibility initiatives, the competitive nature of the sustainability game means that opportunities for integration, collaboration, and collective action are likely stymied across the sector. Management at R003 shared a poignant story about being forced to stop participating in a feminine hygiene project in Ethiopia due to threats from the U.S-based importing company that founded the initiative:

> Sourcing Director: We're not allowed to actually participate in this girls' pad project anymore because the company I used to work for [who started the project] said they wouldn't buy coffee from them if we advertised our involvement.
>
> Company Owner: I was just shocked when the company told [the Ethiopian farmers] they wouldn't buy coffee from them anymore if they let us participate in the pad program […] you could see that the community was hurt by this […] they didn't know how to deal with this lawyer letter and as soon as [the community leader] explained [the letter] to us, we were like "ok, we will not push!"

This story highlights one of the major unintended consequences and limitations of CSR when it becomes a competitive sport: the alarming ways already marginalized coffee growing communities may be further exposed to injustices and market exclusion due to their unintentional failure to comply with the project stipulations of foreign buyers. In some cases, like this one, corporate social initiatives come with requirements that threaten producers' autonomy and ability to self-determine and govern their own market relationships (Mutersbaugh 2002). In this context, CSR is no longer for the benefit of coffee communities alone; first and foremost, it appears to be for the benefit of coffee companies in major consumer markets.

Through the process of defining participation, this program and others driven by differentiation and market potential, risk creating new geographies of exclusion and marginalization in the name of empowerment, collaboration, and equality (Dolan 2010). Because initiatives like these are often created as part of a social business model and as a way to garner product differentiation, other coffee companies are also often prohibited from becoming collaborators or partners. In spite of programs' language of partnership and collaboration, these types of initiatives are often highly competitive pursuits that are characterized by limited information sharing and strategic inclusion and exclusion of participants (Rajak 2008). As a result of this type of competition and exclusivity, some social responsibility initiatives become one coffee initiative among many others, alluding to the ways in which the self-interest of individual business firms can result in the development of disparate sustainability initiatives that do not converge to achieve common sustainability goals.

Without greater transparency and collaboration between firms and better corporate governance reforms that hold firms accountable for assessing their actions in coffee-producing communities, more and more ad hoc corporate social initiatives will likely be conceptualized and implemented in the future. These programs may have unintended consequences in coffee-producing communities due to limited organizational capacities, project stipulations, or misunderstandings across cultural distances. Overtime, these consequences could have deleterious effects on relationships of trust across the supply chain and impede efforts to develop context-specific sustainability initiatives that respond to the self-defined needs and desires of coffee producing communities around the world (Harris 2003). Moreover, with no way of measuring and tracking disparate CSR outcomes in coffee growing communities around the world, industry-wide pursuits of a sustainable supply chain will likely remain fraught with inefficiency and unable to address the root causes of social, economic, and environmental injustice that continue to confront the global coffee industry.

Thus, CSR as a competitive sport has severe implications for the industry. As I have illustrated, new sites of inclusion and exclusion emerge in an already unjust global industry and collective pursuits become fragmented by corporate self-interest (Mutersbaugh 2002, Dolan 2010, Blowfield and Dolan 2014). R002's coffee director captured this risk perfectly in an online blog entry on the company's website:

> Sustainable coffee is a multi-billion-dollar business […] Every roaster has a story about why their coffee is better […] Some of these roasters oppose certification because they believe it's arbitrary, ineffective, expensive to the producer, or irrelevant, even detrimental to quality […] I don't see how these problems are solved by LESS transparency, LESS accountability, and WITHOUT formal definitions and metrics […] I think an every-roaster-for-him/herself philosophy moves our industry further from progress and accountability for our role in social and ecological ills.

As I argue in the following section, without making social responsibility a pre-competitive pursuit, supply chain sustainability will likely continue to elude the global coffee industry. In a supply chain like coffee where injustices are reproduced by complex social, economic, political, and environmental circumstances that traverse extensive spatial and cultural scales, the leveraging of collective resources; the integration of disparate efforts; and participatory, democratic approaches to sustainability design may be the only way to effectively transform the industry (Harris 2003, Fortwengel and Jackson 2016). In the final section of analysis that follows, I build on this argument and consider the potential for emerging multi-stakeholder initiatives and industry business associations to mitigate the limitations of firm-led sustainability efforts in the industry; create shared governance structures across the supply chain; and increase the capacity of small firms to pre-competitively support collective pursuits of a more socially, economically, and environmentally just supply chain.

4.3: Multi-stakeholder Initiatives and the Future of Sustainability in the Coffee Sector

In the two previous chapters, I explored what small specialty coffee roasting and importing companies' sustainability and corporate responsibility commitments look like in practice. Through analyses of company marketing campaigns, business strategies and motivations, and implementation obstacles, I revealed some of the unique challenges that small specialty coffee businesses may face as they endeavor to join and support the pursuit of a sustainable supply chain in the global coffee industry. These analyses revealed that ruptures often exist between how companies represent their sustainability and CSR efforts in marketing and advertising and how those efforts play out in reality. I also argued that limited organizational capacities and the competitive nature of CSR could result in a compromised, fragmented approach to sustainability across the coffee sector.

In this section, I conclude analyses by exploring how business associations like the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) and multi-stakeholder initiatives like the Sustainable Coffee Challenge (SCC) and the Global Coffee Platform (GCP) may provide opportunities to help mitigate some of the inefficiencies and unintended consequences of small firms' engagement with corporate responsibility and sustainability. I argue that the specialty sector may be ripe for the creation of best practice guidelines, mentorship networks, and tailored sustainability baselines that can be more effectively supported by small and medium-sized businesses in the U.S. specialty coffee sector (Beschorner and Hajduk 2017). This type of institutional coordination may enable the specialty sector to better define sustainability and social responsibility; reach consensus about the types of roles small coffee businesses may fulfill in supporting sustainability; and also help avoid the unintended consequences that may occur when CSR is conceived of and pursued among small firms with limited organizational resources (Grayson and Nelson 2013, Berkowitz et al. 2017, Beschorner and Hajduk 2017). Through this discussion, I raise important questions about the potential role shared governance structures, evolving institutions, and collective action networks may play in aligning private social responsibility initiatives across the specialty sector and ultimately, fostering effective social, economic, and environmental sustainability transitions in the future.

Although the previous chapters revealed that contradictions sometimes exist between roasters' and importers' personal and business motivations for adopting sustainability commitments, some participants acknowledged that collaboration is likely key to achieving a sustainable coffee supply chain in the future. For example, R002's Coffee Director said, "I just feel that any significant effort that we can make is going to be made through collaboration. I just don't see that we can have that much influence when our main driving factor is to try to get good coffees for ourselves." By donating a portion of the company's proceeds to NGOs, R002 financially supports larger efforts to address inequalities and injustices in the supply chain and acknowledges their own lack of expertise to undertake these types of actions on their own.

The potential utility of collective action in the specialty coffee sector was also revealed in a February 2017 campaign to raise money for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). After Donald Trump, the President of the United States, proposed to ban refugees and immigrants from seven Muslim countries from entering the United States, Royal Coffee Importers and Sprudge—an online food and beverage publication—

launched a sector-wide campaign to raise money to support the ACLU's campaign to halt the President's executive order. Royal Coffee Importer's owner justified the campaign on the company website, writing, "as an industry whose very existence relies on the labor of frequently marginalized groups of people, I believe there is shared responsibility to push back now against the rising tide of unequal justice […]"

After establishing the campaign, Royal Coffee Importers and Sprudge put out a call for other specialty coffee cafes to join the effort. Between February 3 and 5, 2017, over 850 cafes and coffee businesses joined this cross-sector initiative in the name of defending refugee and immigrant families in the United States. All together, the donations made by participating cafes totaled $423,373.34 for the ACLU: almost half a million dollars!

This example illustrates how collective action in the specialty coffee sector may be able to increase the positive impact of corporate social initiatives among small firms (Weltzien Høivik and Shankar 2011). However, many small firms in the industry also continue to pursue their own sustainability initiatives, choosing from a menu of sustainability options and definitions as they pursue socially responsible business practices. This menu of options, paired with inefficient accountability structures, privileges a diversity of approaches to sustainability and corporate responsibility and as I have argued, likely fragments sector-wide efforts to achieve a sustainable supply chain.

During my interview with the North American Ambassador of the Global Coffee Platform (GCP), this risk of fragmentation was described perfectly. The GCP is striving to integrate sustainability initiatives across the supply chain by forging collective action networks around social, economic, and environmental sustainability. As Mary detailed the organization's efforts to enable greater sustainability impact by fostering more effective investments, she lamented the affects of competition on supply chain sustainability. She said,

> Sustainability needs to become a business model, not charity, it's not faith, we're not on a mission from God […] To some extent, sustainability in the coffee sector has been a competitive sport. All of us need to work together. And we need to stop competing against each other and it's difficult for this industry because coffee is a very competitive industry […] We need to turn our discussion into how to make sustainable practices—economically, socially and environmentally—part of the DNA of the coffee industry, part of our sector-wide business model. That's systemic change.

Without this type of codified, integrated practice referenced above, firm-led initiatives, especially among smaller companies, will likely continue to do a little good here and there, but fail to support the systematic change the sector is striving to attain (Nelson 2004, Peter 2005).

This perspective was echoed during my interview with the Sustainability Director for the Specialty Coffee Association. She discussed the need to take sustainability out of the competitive arena and establish sustainable business practices as a foundational characteristic of the specialty sector. At one point, she suggested the limitations of firm-led initiatives and indicated support for more collaborative efforts. She went on to express the SCA's potential role in moving the sector towards a pre-competitive, collaborative approach to sustainability,

> For example by saying, "let's agree not to use this as a competitive advantage anymore." In order for [sustainability] to be durable and succeed long term, it can't be subject to the marketing department because it could fall out of fashion or companies risk over claiming their sustainability efforts […] There's a need to make sustainability embedded in the core of the industry.

In recent CSR research, scholars have raised the topic of industry-specific CSR strategies and the role business associations like the SCA and multi-stakeholder initiatives like the GCP may play in integrating, standardizing, and regulating business practices across a vast number of differently organized and positioned firms (Berkowitz et al. 2017, Carrigan et al. 2017, Marques 2017). This research considers how CSR and sustainability principles are diffused and adopted across an industry or sector (Berkowitz et al. 2017, Beschorner and Hajduk 2017); what types of tailored resources small firms may need in the pursuit of CSR (Carrigan et al. 2017); and how sector-specific institutions may serve as regulatory entities that can develop and facilitate tailored solutions to complex social, economic, and environmental sustainability issues (Marques 2017).

Interviews with the GCP and SCA suggest the evolving regulatory and coordinating role meta-organizations like these could play in establishing pre-competitive collaborations for social responsibility and sustainability in the specialty coffee sector (Berkowitz et al. 2017). The potential exists for such organizations to help mitigate the negative sustainability outcomes of firm-led voluntary initiatives and push against the power of private standard setting practices that proliferate in the industry. This may happen, for example, through the establishment of sector-wide definitions of sustainability and social responsibility; best practice guidelines and regulations for different types of actors in the industry; or, through the creation of mentorship networks for small companies (Grayson and Nelson 2013, Carrigan et al. 2017). Through the creation of shared governance and accountability structures and collective action networks, multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations may create opportunities to streamline, integrate, and codify the sustainability initiatives of different industry stakeholders.

The SCA and GCP are also bringing together industry actors with different organizational capacities, perspectives, and resources in an effort to foster collaborative initiatives and professional networks that may more effectively leverage the resources and knowledge of differently positioned individuals and groups towards common sustainability goals. How this coordination happens over time is worthy of extensive research about the structure of effective shared governance and collective action. However, annual conferences like the Specialty Coffee Expo, Re;Co Symposium, and the 2017 AVANCE Sustainability Conference hosted by the Specialty Coffee Association provide valuable examples of emerging efforts that bring together industry interests from around the world to engage in conversations about the state of the industry and best practices to achieve social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

While not all of these events are distinctly focused on sustainability, they increasingly provide opportunities for coffee companies, NGOs, producers and others supply chain actors to collectively brainstorm sustainability definitions, agendas, and metrics that can be more effectively tracked across the entire sector (Brammer, Jackson and Matten 2012, Marques 2017). The possible utility of these exercises should not be understated. Beschorner and Hajduk (2017) argue, for example, that definitions promoted by business associations can help build specific frames of action for companies within a sector and help specify social, economic, and environmental sustainability issues that are easier to understand and tackle among specific companies, industry leaders, NGOs and/or business associations within the sector. In the specialty coffee sector, the process of establishing definitions for sustainability and corporate responsibility may help erase the ambiguity of these terms; instill greater confidence in consumers that the messages conveyed in marketing reflect trustworthy, legitimate business practices; and deter private companies from establishing their own approaches to sustainability for the sole purposes of marketing and differentiation. Industry business associations and multi-stakeholder initiatives may also provide small firms with opportunities to gain mentorship about socially responsible business practices and identify opportunities to leverage their resources through collaboration with other coffee companies, NGOs, producer cooperatives, or business associations.

The North American Ambassador at the GCP, for example, shared a story from the organization's first global sustainability conference, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland in October 2017. This event brought together individuals from every point along the global coffee supply chain and provided a place for industry actors to share knowledge and concerns about the sustainability issues confronting the sector:

> We thought it was important to establish an annual meeting dedicated to the progress of coffee sustainability where people could come from all over the world, from farmers to roasters, even consumers […] and present to each other about what's going on in their specific industries and their countries […] We've never really had a place before to cross compare and cross pollinate […] We invited competitors in the trade to stand up with each other and to invite their sustainability programs and initiative partners to present to each other so that people can see what is going on at the other end of the supply chain and hear about how different companies with different personalities that buy different kinds of coffees, do things.

Institutions like the SCA and the GCP will likely become critical facilitators to the future success of sustainability initiatives undertaken in both consuming and producing countries. With each coffee-producing country experiencing its own unique challenges, flexible, adaptive, coordinated efforts are likely needed to effectively address the systematic inequalities and injustices that persist across the industry.

As I have shown, it is risky to assume that businesses—without proper guidance, mentorship, and baselines—can rise to these challenges and conceptualize, develop, implement, and monitor, long-term, sustainability initiatives in coffee-producing countries around the world. Multi-stakeholder organizations like the SCA, SCC, and GCP, on the other hand, have extensive inter-organizational networks across the supply chain and are likely better equipped to establish context-specific, democratically conceptualized sustainability interventions that respond to the distinct challenges confronting different coffee-producing communities. Because of their long-standing relationships and inter-firm networks with public and private actors across the supply chain, these types of institutions are likely better positioned to effectively develop the standards, reporting and monitoring practices, and capacity building and mentoring programs that are needed to consolidate, guide, and monitor integrated, sector-wide sustainability efforts in the future (Berkowitz et al. 2017). By recommending, promoting and tailoring different sustainability guidelines and best practices to particular actors in the supply chain, industry associations and multi-stakeholder initiatives may also help downscale sustainability issues and provide organizational frames of action that can be more effectively integrated and monitored towards common sustainability pursuits (Beschorner and Hajduk 2017). Without this type of guidance and accountability, a fragmented, everyone-for-themselves approach to sustainability will likely continue to hinder consolidated efforts to address social, economic, and environmental sustainability challenges across the supply chain. As Grayson and Nelson (2013: 31) note,

> Multi-stakeholder platforms, more traditional business associations and academic institutions will have an increasingly crucial role to play in embedding and scaling responsible business practices and sustainability, in addition to growth in industry- and issue-specific business-led coalitions.

While potential exists for these evolving institutions to help facilitate coordinated efforts to address social, economic, and environmental injustices across the sector, their potential should not be overly romanticized. Disseminating best practice guidelines and implementing regulatory tools to oversee business practices is inherently challenging in a sector as geographically dispersed as the specialty coffee. This is likely markedly true in a sector that has had few regulatory bodies for sustainability and social responsibility in the past. Fostering buy-in from companies that have had the luxury of developing their own sustainability strategies will likely not come without resistance and skepticism. Yet, by establishing certain institutional conditions to oversee business practices—such as, social responsibility regulations and enforcement strategies based on negotiations and consensus building with stakeholders across the supply chain; or more consistent monitoring of business practices by NGOs, investors, consumers, and/or business associations—the coffee industry may become better equipped to ensure that businesses' social responsibility practices make meaningful contributions to broader sustainability goals, rather than "pay rhetorical lip service to the issue" (Campbell 2007: 963).

Even with this regulatory capacity, other challenges will likely manifest as multi-stakeholder initiatives and meta-organizations try to incorporate small businesses into their sustainability programs. Some small companies interviewed during this research, for example, expressed a wariness of institutionalization, umbrella organizations, and sector-wide multi-stakeholder initiatives. They expressed concern that these types of organizations may be controlled by the perspectives of large multinational corporations like Starbucks and Nestlé and irrelevant to the needs, interests, and capabilities of smaller companies.

This was elucidated during my interviews with importers and roasters. During my conversation with I001's General Manager, for example, I asked if the company had made any commitments to the Sustainable Coffee Challenge (SCC), another multi-stakeholder initiative in the coffee sector that is striving to bring together coffee roasters, importers, NGOs and other industry actors to increase awareness about sustainable coffee and raise demand in consumer markets. While I001 is committed to sustainable sourcing models, the company's management has been hesitant to join the SCC:

> We thought about making a commitment [to the Sustainable Coffee Challenge] and we still haven't gotten around to it. My perspective on that is that it's really more for the Starbucks of the world and the huge coffee importers and multinationals. I think it's just one of those, you know, "we're going to make a large statement" and it's really nothing more than making commitments and statements […] I think it's great, but I don't think it's going to change anything in terms of how our customers and industry view [sustainability]. I think in the end it's more of a reputational thing, but that said, I think it's a great thing that's happening.

This perspective of the SCC reveals that multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations may have a significant amount of legwork to do to foster buy-in and trust among smaller firms. Because of the extensive financial resources of MNC's and their ability to establish frames of action across the industry, small firms like those included in this research study may wonder who establishes the rules of the game. For multi-stakeholder organizations to garner support from small and medium-sized companies, they will likely need to make a case for participation that resonates with the organizational capabilities, business models and missions of smaller firms.

R003's owner also referenced the lack of confidence in these types of multi-stakeholder initiatives. When I asked her about the GCP and the SCC and what she thought about their capacity to affect change in the industry, she stated that she thought small firms like hers were better equipped to take on sustainability and social responsibility efforts. She was unsure how global initiatives could have the same kind of community access and relationships of trust that smaller coffee roasting and importing companies sometimes have. This perspective is likely indicative of the current failure of multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations to translate the worth of their inter-organizational networks and resources to small companies in the sector. Without garnering confidence among small firms and providing step-by-step guidelines about how they can engage with and contribute to collective action networks, multi-stakeholder initiatives like these may continue to feel inaccessible and irrelevant to smaller actors in the industry.

Because small companies make up a growing percentage of the specialty coffee industry, it will be critically important for multi-stakeholder initiatives to foster buy-in among small businesses and incorporate the unique capabilities of small firms into industry-wide efforts to achieve a sustainable supply chain. Multi-stakeholder organizations and business associations could tailor and promote social responsibility practices for smaller companies, emphasizing practices like educating consumers about the true cost, value and challenges of coffee production; supporting larger NGOs in their established efforts; consistently paying fair prices for coffee and working with reputable importers; and joining other companies and NGOs in collective pursuits in an effort to curtail duplicitous efforts and the inefficient use of resources. These types of curated actions, when combined with broader efforts, could enable small businesses to form essential cogs in the sustainability wheel.

Evidence from the coffee sector also suggests that multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations may be positioned to forge relationships with governments in coffee-producing regions, challenging the buyer-driven nature of the market at present (Ponte 2002a, Ponte 2004, Giovannucci and Ponte 2005, Ponte and Cheyns 2013). Given that many of the social, economic, and environmental challenges confronting the industry are a direct result of ineffective government oversight, bringing government involvement back into sector-wide sustainability initiatives will likely be critical to the industry wide pursuit of a sustainable supply chain (Warner and Sullivan 2017).

As I have argued, business alone—especially small business—cannot be expected to affect systematic change. Global multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations like the GCP, SCC and SCA, however, have extensive inter-organizational networks that traverse vast geographic, economic, and cultural distances. Through these networks, these organizations may help facilitate knowledge flow across the entire supply chain and foster sector-wide understandings about the structures that continue to reproduce inequalities and injustices around the world. With this integrated, dynamic understanding of sustainability issues, multi-stakeholder initiatives can mobilize the situated knowledge of governments, producers, NGOs, importers, roasters, and other industry and non-industry actors, creating shared governance models to achieve strategic, measurable sustainability goals. Without these types of coordinating institutions, sustainability and social responsibility will likely continue to be market-based approaches to sustainability issues, “[emerging] reactively rather than systematically, rolled out in fits and starts by particular actors and sets of interests” (Dolan and Rajak 2016: 6).

By bringing small companies into networked relationships with NGOs, governments, competing companies, producers, and other actors across the supply chain, the GCP, SCC and SCA may also alleviate business firms from the burden of believing that they must achieve sustainability and social responsibility alone. With their coordinating and regulating capacities and inter-organizational networks across the supply chain, these entities may provide critical assistance in building bridges between the ongoing sustainability efforts of importers, roasters, governments, NGOs, producers, and the many other stakeholders that collectively influence how social, economic, and environmental sustainability will be achieved in the future.

Recent CSR scholarship shows that multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations do have the potential to build shared visions, values and goals across specific industry sectors (Fortwengel and Jackson 2016); improve organizational capacity among small firms by leveraging collective resources and capabilities (Weltzien Høivik and Shankar 2011, Carrigan et al. 2017); reduce the complexities associated with conceptualizing, implementing, and monitoring CSR (Carrigan et al. 2017); and increase confidence in CSR actions across an entire industry. Evidence suggests that institutional forces and collective actions networks are beginning to fulfill these roles in the coffee sector and are striving to forge a more transparent, responsible, and measurable sustainability agenda for the entire industry; one that is responsive to the needs and desires of stakeholders across the supply chain. Through the institutionalizing, integrating and coordinating efforts of these types of institutions, the specialty coffee sector and the global coffee industry at large may “dramatically increase collective efforts to drive for more transformative, large-scale system-level change in value chains, markets, and public policy (Grayson and Nelson 2013: 34).

How small companies will fit within these coordinated industry-wide efforts to achieve a sustainable supply chain remains to be seen. Yet, one thing is clear: with their numbers soaring into the thousands in the United States market alone, small specialty coffee companies have a role to play in this industry’s sustainability journey. Whether that role is positive, negative or neutral will likely depend on the ability of multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations to provide small companies with the tools, mentorship, and accountability structures they need to responsibly, effectively, and transparently engage in sustainability and social responsibility initiatives across the supply chain.

5. Discussion

There are inherent limitations to the findings of this qualitiative study. This is a small-scale study of a single sector within a global industry. The study offers an in-depth critical examination of sustainability practices among small firms in the U.S. specialty coffee sector, but it cannot, without further research, make conclusive generalizations about the entire industry.

While I hoped to include roasting and importing companies from across the United States in this study, there were geographical and temporal limitations to this study. Participant roasting companies represented a geographic cluster based in New Mexico. Regardless of this geographic limitation, these companies represent a diversity of persepectives and practices related to sustainability and corporate responsibility. This is true for participant importers, too. Participant importers were selected after receiving recommendations from roaster participants. While I attempted to interview other roasting and importing companies across the industry, I did not receive responses to my invitations to participate. Similarly, interviews with industry experts at the Specialty Coffee Association and the Global Coffee Platform are only representative of two perspectives from emerging multi-stakeholder intiatives in the industry.

Ideally, additional perspectives would be included in the study to better ensure saturation was reached (Siedman 2013). However, to add further context to the perspectives offered by research participants, I conducted web-based research of textual materials like reports, blogs, industy magazines, and organizational websites from other importers, roasters, and multi-stakeholder iniatives. These data, from more than 50 sources, helped understand broader trends in the specialty coffee sector and evaluate the extent to which participants' perspectives and experiences may be echoed by other firms in the sector.

In spite of the limitations of scale inherent to this study, this research provides important insights about the state of sustainability and corporate responsibility in the specialty coffee sector and how supply chain sustainability may be more effectively achieved in the future. At a broader scale, the findings from this research are 1) likely applicable to other global commodity chains like cocoa, tea, artisinal distillates, and bananas; 2) raise important questions about the limitations of market-based approaches to supply chain governance and the unintended consequences of neoliberal governmentality; and 3) highlight the importance of better understanding how evolving institutional ecosystems and shared governance networks may forge alternative trade and value regimes that are grounded in equality, transparency, and justice.

In summary, the three major critiques of this study reveal that sustainability, justice, and equality are on the minds of many in the U.S. specialty coffee sector. While certifications like Fairtrade and USDA Organic, and private voluntary initiatives like direct trade, have given many companies the language to talk about the social, economic, and ecological ills confronting the industry, sustainability initiatives remain hindered by an everyone-for-themselves approach to transformation. Marketing campaigns, competition and mistrust, and uncoordination, I argue, have fostered an industry ecosystem in which collaboration and communication between differently positioned actors in the supply chain has not supported the realization of collective sustainability goals. I argue, however, that greater transparency, accountability and regulation of private sustainability initiatives, brought forth through emerging institutional and governance bodies, may forge an alternative, more effective future for sustainable coffee. Through these coordinating bodies, integrated, adaptive, democratically identified sustainability approaches may emerge that leverage the resources of actors across the supply chain and produce measurable solutions to the systematic human-environment challenges that continue to confront the industry.

To further understand how these evolving institutions may confront the unintended consequences and inefficiencies of private sustainability initiatives in the coming years, I recommend a few avenues for future research. In the context of small businesses in the specialty coffee sector, critical inquiry is needed to continue understanding the distinct organizational capabilities of small and medium-sized companies in the sector and the most effective roles these types of businesses can play in the industry-wide pursuit of a sustainable supply chain. Industry-specific CSR research could also help establish sustainability baselines and best practice guidelines that respond to the organizational characteristics of differently-sized companies in the specialty coffee sector. Industry-wide surveys of firm-led sustainability practices and company perceptions of effectiveness may also provide important insights about the state of private voluntary initiatives and their effects at different points along the supply chain. At a broader level, future CSR scholarship should continue analyzing the possible collective impact of small firms' social responsibility initiatives. Afterall, small firms possess signficant market power in economies around the world and likely influence how social, economic, and environmental processes play out across time and space.

Additionally, future research could examine how coffee-producing communities engage with and respond to the private voluntary sustainability initiatives of businesses in major consumer markets. By better understanding the possible unintended consequences of these types of programs in coffee-producing communities, multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations will likely be able to make a stronger case to private companies that their self-guided sustainability initiatives may do more harm than good.

At the same time, critical inquiry into multi-stakeholder intitiatives and business associations like the GCP and SCA is needed to clarify the extent to which supply chain actors, large and small, are incorporated into sustainability initiatives and networked governance across the supply chain. If these types of initiatives and meta-organizations are predominately guided by large MNCs and predominant governing bodies in the industry, for example, they may not provide a long-term, viable alternative to the structures of power and dominance that produce marginalization for smallholder producers around the world and also, encourage smaller businesses to pusue sustainability projects on their own accord. Thus, future research shoould critically examine how power and knowledge is distributed, wielded and resisted through shared governance structures and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Through this type of critical inquiry, scholarship will be able to better assess the extent to which evolving institutions like the GCP, SCA, and SCC are able to confront the negative implications of market-based solutions and power hierarchies to the industry's most pressing human-enviornment challenges.

Lastly, future research could examine how institutional coordination and shared governance networks may be most effectively mobilized and structured to build strategic alliances between NGOs, governments, corporations, roasters and importers, producers, and the many other actors that influence how social, economic, and environmental sustainability plays out for communities across the supply chain. Social network analyses (Gulati 1998, Edwards 2010, Glasbergen 2010, Bögenhold 2013, Glückler 2013, Cárcamo, Garay-Flühmann and Gaymer 2014, Albareda and Waddock 2016, Hauck, Schmidt and Werner 2016) could help visualize and examine which actors have influence across the global coffee supply chain; how sustainability resources move between communities; and how firm-led social responsibility initiatives and resources may be better coordinated and leveraged across geographic, cultural, and temporal distances to achieve social, economic, and environmental sustainability goals in coffee-producing countries around the world.

In conclusion, achieving an alternative future for sustainability in the coffee sector—where firms, NGOs, governments, business associations, producers, and other supply chain actors work together to realize measurable sustainability goals—will require long-term, coordinated efforts that bring into conversation the situated knowledge, interests, and experiences of actors across the entire supply chain, from seed to cup. New regulating institutions and multi-stakeholder initiatives likely have a critical role to play in this effort, 1) pushing against private power and interests at the global, national, regional, and local scales of the coffee supply chain, and 2) forging the accountability and transparency structures that can better ensure that firms are not simply paying lip service to the industry's greatest challenges.

Without these evolving instituions, coordinating bodies, and new governance and accountability structures, good sustainability intentions—especially among private businesses—will likely continue to remain just that; with fragmentation, self-interest and the inefficient use of resources reproducing inequality, injustice and environmental degradation in coffee-producing communities around the world. With continued critical inquiry into the opportunities and challenges that confront the global coffee industry as it pursues supply chain sustainability, however, the sector may become better equipped to access the tools, knowledge, collaboration, and adaptation that will be necessary to foster an alternative, more sustainable future for the industry.

With continued critical evaluation of lessons learned across the supply chain, this industry's pursuit of sustainability has the potential to serve as an example of how coordinated industry actors can push against the power of commodity markets and private self-interest in pursuit of alternative social, economic, and environmental futures. Emerging evidence from this research suggests that the coffee industry may provide a beacon of hope for how to achieve supply chain sustainability, illustrating the ways in which evolving institutions like multi-stakeholder initiatives and business associations may help 1) restructure governance and regulatory environments, 2) leverage collective resources and knowledge, and 3) work in concert with public and private interests to ensure a more sustainable future marked by value chain equity, justice, and environmental conservation.

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