

Business Anthropology's Lens into Gender Equity: Assessing the Impact of 'Smart Economics' in the Coffee Sector

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This article investigates the impact of a smart economics-inspired women's coffee program within a Oaxaca, Mexico coffee producer organization across four realms: economic decision-making and control over income; coffee land ownership and yields; organizational participation; and access to gender equity programs and services. I find that the program largely fails to substantively reduce gendered agricultural asset gaps or promote gender equity. However, it is correlated with an increase in women's organizational participation, an openness to gender equity programs, and increased access to services such as agricultural trainings. In conclusion, the article demonstrates how the women's coffee program not only fails to close the gender agricultural asset gap among Southern Mexican coffee producers, but in fact relies upon it by using targeted premiums to actively recruit individual women into gender-branded value chains. In so doing, corporations use the women coffee farmers to generate additional profits through higher prices, niche marketing and brand enhancement, yet do not equitably share these with women farmers. The article answers calls for business anthropology to more explicitly investigate social relations and systems of power when comparing social forms of business organizations and the diverse cultures that shape them.

Keywords: smart economics, feminist anthropology, intersectionality, coffee, agricultural development

INTRODUCTION

In general, business anthropology hasn't engaged systematically with questions of race, class, and gender intersectionality, leading some to argue that there is a critical lack of anthropological research on women in business (Brondo and Baba 2006). Similarly, while a substantial body of feminist anthropology scholarship analyzes economic policy and institutions, production and consumption, and transnational flows of capital and labor, little of this work explicitly transects the field of business anthropology. One exception is the growing body of work that carefully uses feminist theories and methodologies to research gender within the finance and banking industries (See, for example, Fisher 2012; Ho 2009; Zaloom 2006). The field of business anthropology is holistic in its theoretical and methodological approaches, encompassing a diverse and broad range of perspectives and tools. However, it would benefit from a deeper, synergistic engagement with feminist anthropology, particularly work that is informed by a political economy approach that respects many histories, adopts a social constructionist position, and understands gender as embedded in larger institutions and forms of hierarchy (race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality) (Lamphere 2015).

Here I use the methods and theoretical insights of feminist and business anthropology to explore the ways in which neoliberal capitalism has co-opted feminism, a process that scholars refer to as post-feminism (McRobbie 2009), market feminism (Fisher 2012; Kantola and Squires 2012) and transnational business feminism (Roberts 2012). These “depoliticized feminisms” (Fisher 2017) promote women’s empowerment through mobile assemblages of technologies, techniques, and practices that are appropriated selectively as they come into contact with ‘local’ politics and cultures (Newman 2013). As I detail below, this trend is particularly pronounced in international development and market-based poverty alleviation programs. In recent years, the quest for gender economic equality “has become a vital component of contemporary anti-poverty initiatives in which great store is set on female agency as a solution to privation in the Global South” (Chant 2016, 2). Responding to data showing a global uptick in a ‘feminization’ of agriculture such that women farmers make up an increasing percentage of the world’s farmers (Dolan and Sorby 2003; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006), many agricultural development interventions now explicitly link women’s empowerment to economic growth through market integration, value chain coordination, and increased farm productivity.

In this article, I examine an agrarian instance of women-focused smart economics via a critical analysis of an emergent ‘woman farmer’ micro-batching program in Southern Mexico. In doing so, I use feminist anthropological perspectives, grounded in intersectionality theory, to answer a call made by Morean (2014) for business anthropology to engage with social relations and structures of power in order to explicitly compare the social forms of business organizations with the various cultures (work, management, regional, etc.) that impinge upon and form them. In short, despite the widespread acceptance of the gendered nature of agricultural value chains, there is a persistent lack of attention to “gender as an ontological, discursive, and strategic category” in agrifood theory (Allen 2014:57). Intersectionality is an analytical tool for examining how socially and culturally constructed categories, such as race, class, and gender, interact to shape social interactions and structures (Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1989). Zander et al. (2010) argue that it is time to address the interplay of issues like power, influence, and social interaction by applying intersectionality thinking to the complex identities of and interactions between individuals within business institutions. An intersectional and gendered analysis of the coffee value chain demonstrates how the smart economics’ gender gap approach tends to revisit structuralist readings of commodity chains rather than systematically think through how women’s agricultural participation is dialectically interwoven with both local and transnational patriarchies and cultural identities.

This article explores how discursive and economic transformations within the fair trade coffee market are reshaping gendered ideologies and agricultural practices in Mexico. After detailing the nature of these transformations, it investigates the impact of one smart economics-inspired women’s coffee program within the Oaxaca, Mexico coffee producer organization, Café de Oro, across four realms: economic decision-making and control over income; coffee land ownership and yields; organizational participation; and access to gender equity programs and services. I demonstrate that the program largely fails to substantively reduce gendered agricultural asset gaps or promote gender equity. However, it is correlated with an increase in women’s organizational participation, an openness to gender equity programs, and increased access to services such as agricultural trainings. In conclusion, I argue that the women’s coffee program not only fails to close the gender agricultural asset gap among Southern Mexican coffee producers, but in fact relies upon it by using targeted premiums to actively recruit individual women into gender-branded value chains. In so doing, corporations use the women coffee farmers to generate additional profits through higher prices, niche marketing and brand enhancement, yet do not equitably share these with women farmers.

RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS

This article draws on quantitative and qualitative data from a study of a corporate-initiated women’s coffee program among the members of a coffee producer organization, using the Café de Oro pseudonym, collected between 2014 and 2017 in the Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. The goal is to extend existing

research on smart economics, which has relied most frequently on analysis of corporate textual and visual representations. The analysis also incorporates insights from qualitative research (semi-structured interviews and participant observation) conducted since 2014. This includes international coffee industry conferences and events and meetings of non-governmental organizations and investment funds working on smart economics-inspired agricultural (primarily coffee) development initiatives.

In Oaxaca, one of Mexico's most geographically and culturally diverse states, coffee is predominantly a smallholder crop. The average Oaxacan coffee farmer has 1.24 hectares planted (Amecafé 2013) and family members typically wash, ferment, depulp and dry their coffee within their own homes, selling it in 'parchment' form to local buyers (coyotes) or cooperatives. Oaxaca is one of Mexico's poorest states; its Human Development Index score of .681 places it on par with Botswana. Therefore, coffee production plays an essential role in sustaining the fabric of many rural communities. Farmers surveyed in this research were heavily dependent on coffee income. Sixty-three percent reported that it constitutes half or more of their total household income, while 18 percent said that it is their sole source of income. Most supplemented cash income with subsistence agriculture. However, most found coffee income insufficient, and many coffee communities, including some in this research, experience high rates of out migration to urban areas in Mexico and the United States. To reinforce their efforts, most of Oaxaca's coffee smallholders have joined agricultural cooperatives in order to obtain fair trade and organic certifications and seek to collectively sell their coffee for higher prices than coyotes offer.

In the mid-1990s, fair trade-organic registration data showed that only 9 percent of Oaxaca, Mexico's organic coffee 'farm operators' were women; by 2013 the female farmer rate had increased to 42 percent. This relatively high rate of female coffee production and cooperative participation in this region is reflected in Café de Oro's membership, which is over 40 percent female. Women can join each of the five coffee producer organizations included in the research as fully-fledged, voting members rather than simply by default as part of a coffee producing household unit, an important difference. Producer status is determined by owning or having official usufruct right to at least one parcel of land planted in coffee.

Research began in the summer of 2014 with participant observation and opportunistic semi-structured interviews. Based on feedback from cooperative leaders and members, we returned in March 2015, met with organization members to explain research goals and to train male and female (mostly young adults) local-language research assistants to conduct a stratified survey of 489 coffee organization members. This included five different producer associations located in eighteen villages distributed in the Sierra Norte, Sierra Sur, Mixteca, Sierra Juarez, and Istmo regions. The survey collected gender disaggregated data from coffee organization members and non-members; in other words, we interviewed individual coffee producers (both men and women) rather than (often male) heads of households. In addition, we conducted informal, unstructured interviews with cooperative members, management, and staff, and we engaged in participant observation at cooperative meetings and in the homes of producers. Finally, two gender-specific focus groups were conducted among members of each coffee organization. In 2016, we presented research results to focus groups with members of participating coffee producer organizations, requesting participant feedback to validate conclusions. Results were analyzed using SPSS for the quantitative data, and Atlas.ti for the qualitative data; human subjects approval was obtained through the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board (#48337).

This article focuses in-depth on one of the five coffee producer associations, Café de Oro, a large organization located in the southwestern part of the state (in the Costa and Mixteca regions), which has micro-batched, or created small lots of particular coffees, a portion of women members' coffee for Allegro's Café La Dueña blend since 2008 (see below). The cooperative has 711 members, 312 of whom are women (44%), in twenty-five different communities. The number of female members has increased substantially over the past ten years: only 12 percent of women (vs. 36% of men) have belonged to the cooperative for more than twenty years and 59 percent of female members joined in the last ten years (vs. only 14% of male members during the same time period). The organization's organic coffee is sold primarily to roasters, such as Allegro Coffee, in the United States through the importing firm Sustainable Harvest. Their transition coffee (that is not certified organic yet) is sold to a Oaxaca City-based roaster. In order to determine the impact that the women's coffee program has among the members of Café de Oro, I

systematically compare it to the other organizations in our sample that do not have women-oriented micro-batched coffee. The comparison explores gendered dimensions including relative gendered agricultural asset gaps, economic decision-making, farm ownership and coffee yields, organizational participation, and access to (and views of) gender equity programs and services.

Feminist Anthropology Analytical Framework

My analytical approach, while firmly grounded in the field of business anthropology, is also informed by key concepts in feminist anthropology such as the cultural construction of gender, the ways in which gender affects and is affected by social organization and political economy, and how gender is shaped by diverse forms of socio-political and economic complexity in a global world. It builds upon transnational feminist perspectives which eschew earlier feminist anthropological concerns with women's subordination and consciously move beyond the simple (and erroneous) model of exploited 'third world women.' Instead, it advocates for a more complex awareness of gendered compromises and contradictions within the global economy. Feminist anthropology and feminist ethnographic research is today understood as an intersectional project that is committed to documenting women's lived experience as it is impacted by gender, race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of participants' lives. This is a project that privileges particularity and the importance of individual experience, situated within uneven systems of power (Craven and Davis 2016). This is particularly relevant for research into smart economics programs which, by their very nature, universalize women's experiences within broader narratives of economic development and cultural change. Women's coffee programs are designed to support and empower a generic woman (see the woman coffee farmer construct below) yet women coffee farmers' experiences are particular to their own lived realities and intersecting positionalities within a larger nexus of class, racial, ethnic, and national identities.

My approach is also informed by critically important feminist work from the last three decades which pushed beyond the local vs. global dichotomy in which the global (coffee market) is unfettered by time and space and the local (Mexican women farmers) is rooted in particular moments and generally peripheral spaces (see Freeman 2001). This body of work instead investigates the ways in which the organization of capitalist production is embedded in and transformed through cultural discourses and practices (Ong 1987). It also explores how women's participation in the global economy may simultaneously expand their economic opportunities and generate social tensions and painful dilemmas (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; see also Gibson-Graham 1996). Feminist scholars have more recently built on this earlier scholarship to develop an understanding of how capitalism is formed through the relational performance of productive powers, such as the 'woman coffee farmer' construct discussed below, that exceed formal economic models, practices, boundaries, and market devices (Bear et al 2015).

Women constitute a significant percentage of the members in most Oaxacan coffee producer organizations today. Yet, this does not automatically translate into gender equity. By gender equity, I mean that men and women are treated fairly, according to their respective needs. This includes equal treatment or treatment that is different, but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities based on gendered roles in the society (UNESCO 2000). Gender equity is about more than simple ownership of and access to resources and, therefore, it is critical to examine a broad range of socioeconomic dimensions. With respect to small-scale coffee production, a gender equity approach (rather than equality) might require built-in measures to compensate for the disadvantages, such as the agricultural asset gaps, experienced by women producers. In assessing the women's coffee program, I consider economic decision-making, coffee ownership and yields, organizational participation, and access to and views of gender equity programs and services.

Smart Economics

The smart economics ideology is championed in publications, such as the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Reports, that link aggregate measures of gender equality to measurable levels of economic competitiveness; construct women as agents of global financial recovery; view women and girls as a value for money investment; and relate gender issues to corporatized diversity management

discourses (Calkin 2015; Elias 2013). In agriculture, the gender agricultural asset gap has entered the lexicon of the World Bank (2015) and United Nations (Quisumbing et al. 2014), policy institutes such as the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI 2016), private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates 2016), as well as in smart economics-inspired corporate-backed programs undertaken within agricultural value chains studied here. Parallel initiatives exist within the finance industry where gender mainstreaming is becoming common practice at firms such as Calvert Investments where gender and the goal of gender equality are at the center of every policy area (Fisher 2012).

Smart economics is linked to—and indeed in part emerged from—earlier theories of development efficiency (e.g., high return on investments) and contemporary notions of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Chant and Sweetman (2012) describe smart economics as an efficiency approach to development “with elements of empowerment bolted on to the side,” which depict project beneficiaries as merely requiring a “simple injection of funds or training before becoming powerhouses of agency and action.” The smart economics approach is a direct descendant of the efficiency approach, a cornerstone of the 1980s Women in Development movement (Moser 1989), which stressed that gaps between men and women’s economic opportunities and relative agency were key obstacles to achieving effective development outcomes (Chant 2012). The discourse of smart economics first emerged in the 2000s in reports released by the World Economic Forum and the World Bank.¹ This neoliberal-compatible gender and development discourse positions woman, rather than man, as the archetypal neoliberal subject who is most capable of ensuring the right kind of market-led economic development (Elias 2013). In short, the smart economics approach targets individual women with the goal of narrowing the gender gap and promoting higher returns on investment.

The smart economics agenda has more recently become a cornerstone of transnational business feminism, a constellation of public and private actors, including NGOs, states, and donors that “converge on promoting women’s equality, particularly in the Global South” (Roberts 2012, 87). As corporations transform themselves into development agencies that set and implement agendas, they are able to extend their authority over the social order at different levels and commercialize the problem of poverty (Mosse 2013). This transformation forms part of the broader corporate social responsibility agenda which consists of an evolving, flexible and overlapping set of practices and discourses “through which business (re)makes and asserts itself as an ethical actor” (Dolan and Rajak 2016, 8). As with other, similar corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, here women become,

both the instruments and beneficiaries of processes that change donor recipient relationships, create legibility to global businesses, produce entrepreneurial subjectivities and recode products in ethical terms while at the same time dividing, differentiating, and depleting aspects of social life (Mosse 2013, 239).

Smart economics-inspired business initiatives that generate revenue through strategic investments in and marketing of women are akin to what Leong (2013) terms racial capitalism, or the process of deriving social or economic value from the racial identity of another person. In this case, the unique position of women coffee farmers, situated as they are within a nexus of class, nationality, gender, and ethnic identities, becomes a commodity exploitable for market value.

A business case for the provision of programs to increase women farmers’ access to economic opportunities, financial services, land rights, and other agricultural resources is presented in the World Bank’s 2007-2011 Gender Action Plan Calkin 2016. In this discourse, women farmers are constituted as proactive, caring and entrepreneurial individuals, rather than passive members of a household farming unit. This approach has proved attractive to corporate actors because it represents an innovative way to create new marketable qualities, such as ‘women-produced’ to parallel and enhance organic, fair trade, and other premium qualities. Within the coffee industry, several initiatives to promote gender equity among coffee producers have emerged in recent years, including the Coffee Quality Institute’s Partnership for Gender Equity; the International Women’s Coffee Alliance; certifications such as

‘Women Care’ developed by the *Allianza de Mujeres en Café de Costa Rica*; the ‘Manos de Mujer’ program developed by the certifier *Mayacert* (2015); and women’s coffees such as the *Organic Products Trading Company’s Café Feminino* (OPTCO 2016). In addition, there are corporate-initiated cause marketing campaigns such as *Allegro Coffee’s Café La Dueña*, which is a blend of women-produced coffee from Mexico and Peru, *Peet’s Coffee’s Sisterhood Flight* of three women-produced coffees released for International Women’s Day in 2018 (Bryman 2018), and *Starbucks Reserve Rwanda Hingakawa* coffee, grown by women farmers, and marketed through a splashy campaign and short film (Dahlstrom and Kamikazi 2019; see: <https://youtu.be/GtMJhxsULMo>).

Constructing the Woman Coffee Farmer

Global consumption of coffee is increasing and is reaching record levels in the United States, China, India, and Japan (Perez 2016). However, coffee supply chain resiliency is simultaneously threatened on multiple fronts. Climate change is projected to dramatically decrease the area of land suitable for growing high-quality Arabica varieties in coming decades (Ovalle-Rivera et al. 2015). Declining real prices paid to producers have led to underinvestment in coffee tree ‘renovation’ (older coffee trees are less productive), and a paucity of new farmers. The average age of small coffee farmers in both a Guatemalan and Colombian sample was forty-five (Fischer 2014; Pineda et al. 2015). In Oaxaca, the average age is even higher at fifty-two years. Our sample shows women are slightly younger on average than men: 49 vs. 55.

The growing prominence of the smart economic agenda within agricultural value chains reflects an increasing recognition of the critical role that small farmers, especially women farmers (given the feminization of agriculture), will play in reviving agriculture and increasing its capacity to withstand the onslaughts of climate change in coming decades (Agarwal 2014). In other words, there is increasing agreement that the industry’s future is in women’s hands. Within the coffee industry, a gender lens has become increasingly common in discussions of supply chain resiliency noted above. Amid concerns about maintaining coffee production levels, the coffee industry has taken note of the increasing number of women coffee farmers, viewing them as a new group of people willing (and needing) to maintain production levels. Here I critically examine the circulation of this ‘woman coffee farmer’ construct, following its migration as a form of knowledge that operates within agricultural value chains alongside commodities, salient to both value-chain function and producer identity (see Goodman 2004, 895).

Smart economics employs a discursive construction of women as altruistic caregivers who are more likely than their male counterparts to invest economic resources in their household and children’s future. However, these initiatives do not necessarily embrace collective feminist concerns, but instead advance a “strategic simplification” in which the woman coffee farmer is typically depicted as a hard-working mother, often widowed or living on her own, who takes dutiful care of her coffee and is an admirable environmental steward (Yarrow 2011, 12). In this narrative, even though the woman coffee farmer lacks, in comparison to her male counterparts, access to agricultural resources and credit, she is consistently able to produce high quality coffee deserving recognition (Worthen and Jurado 2018). Viewed as an efficient worker who invests her profits in her household’s well-being and children’s future, the woman coffee farmer is thus an ideal target for smart economics-inspired women’s coffee programs (Lyon et al. 2019). In fact, smart economics needs this type of figure to fulfill its vision of the world: a target of market-oriented intervention that will simultaneously reduce poverty, promote gender equity, and increase supply-chain resiliency.

The woman coffee farmer construct circulates through what Fisher (2012) terms the “global gender mainstreaming policy field” in which gender equity initiatives such as these are an ethos and set of social and technological practices embedded in an intricate network of institutions, investments, and people. Specifically, the woman coffee farmer construct appears in policy briefs and white papers, development initiatives, business conventions, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) annual reports. For example, the Specialty Coffee Association of America suggests that promoting gender equity in coffee-growing regions can improve coffee quality and increase productivity (SCAA 2015). The non-profit Coffee Quality Institute (CQI) goes even further, arguing that gender inequity is a missed business opportunity. The organization spearheads a public-private Partnership for Gender Equity—funded by partners

including the development organization ACDIVOCA, corporations such as Mars Drinks, and leading coffee roasters like Blue Bottle and Equal Exchange—to help businesses identify gender inequities that contribute to weak supply links and missed growth opportunities (CQI 2015). The International Coffee Organization recently (2018) released a Gender Equality “Insight Report” arguing:

Between 20% and 30% of coffee farms are female-operated and up to 70% of labour in coffee production is provided by women, depending on the region. However, the empirical evidence presented in this re-port shows that women have systematically lower access to resources, such as land, credit and information, than men. Improving women’s resilience to economic shocks, such as volatile coffee prices, and building adaptive capacity to climate change also fosters long-term sustainability of rural livelihoods and coffee supply. Hence, empowerment of women involved in coffee production – as farm operators, family labour, or workers – directly contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality. Family members and rural communities will benefit from well documented positive spillovers in various dimensions of economic and social development such as food security, health and education (ICO 2018, 3).

Building on Holmes and Marcus (2008), Fisher (2012) identifies the global gender equality policy arena as a para-ethnographic site: scholars researching topics such as these are navigating a field in which others, such as NGO employees, fair trade certifiers, and business people, are already engaged in a form of ethnographic inquiry as they conduct research, take action, and make policy.

The woman coffee farmer construct is also promoted by the industry organization, International Women’s Coffee Alliance, developed to “empower women in the international coffee community to achieve meaningful and sustainable lives” (IWCA 2016). The organization’s chapters in eighteen coffee producing countries promote women’s involvement in all stages of the coffee value chain. In public presentations, members of the IWCA often use language that resonates with smart economics, promoting a gendered version of the neoliberal focus on individual responsibility. At one biennial meeting, an IWCA chapter leader based in South America explained, “Women are entrepreneurial. They want to improve their life and the lives of others. Women struggle for a better life and we have to think as entrepreneurs no matter how small we are.” Despite the organization’s emphasis on gender equality, it does not embrace a broader feminist agenda that would encompass issues such as reproductive rights and violence against women. In an interview, one of the very dynamic, early leaders of the organization, a North American businesswoman who believes strongly in gender equality and empowering women through economic opportunities, prefaced one of her comments by assuring me, “I’m not a feminist, but...”

One way that the woman coffee farmer discursive construct is operationalized within coffee value chains is through micro-batching women’s coffee, an increasingly popular corporate approach to promoting gender equity within the industry. For example, the Oaxaca, Mexico fair trade coffee cooperative, Café de Oro, like most coffee cooperatives with organic certifications, has a very thorough crop to cup tracking process in place that enables it to easily micro-batch the women’s coffee for Allegro. Sewn onto the burlap of each coffee bag is a green card that lists the community’s name, the farmer’s name, the organic certification number, the date the coffee was delivered, and the total number of bags the farmer sold to the cooperative. Each bag of coffee is then clearly and systematically identified in the cooperative’s central warehouse and it is relatively easy for workers to separate out the women’s coffee for processing and shipment.

This strategy was pioneered in 2001 by The Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarias SOPPEXCCA, producers of Las Hermanas coffee (Root Capital 2015a), through an alliance with Peet’s Coffee and the importer Sustainable Harvest. In 2004 Café Feminino (OPTCO 2016) was introduced by the Organic Products Trading Company and the Peruvian cooperative Cecanor. Peru quickly became the leading producer of women’s coffee today and the Junta Nacional del Café estimated that twenty containers of women’s coffee were exported in 2011 by thirteen producer organizations (Twin Trading 2013). More

recently roasters such as Equal Exchange and Allegro have introduced their own women's coffees. Since 2008, Café de Oro has sold micro-batches of their coffee to Allegro Coffee.² The coffee retails as Café La Dueña and Allegro advertises that, "we noticed over the years that women's coffee often outshines the men's. That, and the fact that historically female coffee growers received little recognition for their hard work, we decided to ask that beans be separated to make a women's super-lot" (Allegro 2015a). This quote explicitly illustrates how the women coffee farmer construct is operationalized into actual agricultural production and business practices.

The Allegro micro-batch is made up of coffee produced by women from sixteen of Café de Oro's twenty-five member communities. To qualify for the micro-batch, the coffee must cup at an eighty-five or above on the specialty coffee quality scale. This means that only women living in communities above a certain altitude can be included in the program. Café de Oro produces two lots of this high-quality women's coffee for Allegro each year. Allegro pays an additional premium per pound for this coffee (on top of the fair trade and organic differentials). The premium is used to fund women's programming and pay the salary of the employee in charge of these efforts (in other words, it is not returned to the participating farmers in the form of higher prices).

In a 2013 blog post, Christy Thorns, Allegro's Director of Sourcing and Quality Control, explained how Café de Oro originally proposed the idea of the Women's Coffee to Allegro:

as a way to garner a higher premium and provide an opportunity for a higher level of participation in the co-op by the female members, many of whom were taking care of their children alone while their husbands were working in the United States. After having their lots separated and bulked into full container volumes for a couple of years, we noticed that these women's lots consistently scored a couple points higher than the other co-op lots that we bought. This outcome tied back nicely to the idea that women are generally better care givers, and this carries over to the added attention they pay to the horticulture, harvesting and processing of coffee (Thorns 2013).

This portrait of women's affective care and dexterity repeats certain gendered discourses found in other analyses of women's production, from the maquiladora industry (Wright 2006) to sustainability narratives about 'environmental care' (Agarwal 2015, Nightingale 2011). These cultural discourses affirm supposedly natural gender traits, but do not challenge gender's social construction or the inequalities that emerge from the heterogeneous processes through which people, labor, plants, sentiments, and lifeways are converted into resources for various projects of production (Bear, et al. 2015).

In summary, like other development discourses, the woman coffee farmer should not be understood as an "external set of global practices that floats above pre-existing local social and cultural differences" (Yarrow 2011, 15). Instead, it is a construct that can be used to negotiate and frame personal and collective identities in ways that make sense at multiple stages in the agricultural value chain. As demonstrated below, women coffee farmers in Oaxaca, Mexico do face a set of unique challenges that at times resonate with the idea of the hard-working woman coffee farmer. However, unsurprisingly, the construct does not encapsulate the complexity of their personal identities that emerge from a very specific political-economic and cultural context. Consequently, programs designed to help the woman coffee farmer have more of a symbolic than material impact and do little to confront the broader inequalities that empowerment would necessitate.

Assessing the Impact of the Women's Coffee Program

The micro-batching women's coffee program in theory exemplifies the smart economics agenda to reward price premiums and a dedicated market niche to women members who produce high-quality coffee. Presumably, the rationale is that this financial investment will, in turn, help to promote gender equity through the reduction of agricultural asset gaps and increase women's agency within both household and business organizations. However, as Table 1 indicates there are no noticeable differences

in the significant relative asset gaps experienced by women members of Café de Oro, except for agricultural training/assistance, when compared with women of the other four coffee organizations.

TABLE 1

Variable	Café de Oro Women (72)	Café de Oro Men (68)	Women Members (178)	Men Members (171)	Significance
Agricultural Assets					
Own cargo animals	33%	49%	26%	41%	Café de Oro: Not significant Other: .0046
Own 2.5 ha. of land or less	49%	18%	37%	20%	Café de Oro: .0001 Other: .0006
Participation in güesa	51%	46%	38%	30%	4-way: .0279 Café de Oro: Not significant Other: Not significant
Receive Procampo payments	24%	56%	21%	63%	Café de Oro: .0001 Other: .0001
Received credit from organization	19%	13%	17%	13%	Café de Oro: Not significant Other: Not significant
Received technical assistance from org.	89%	54%	44%	35%	4-way: .0001 Café de Oro: .0001 Other: Not significant
Economic decision-making, earnings, and organizational participation					
Retain Sole Control Over Coffee Earnings	40%	7%	35%	12%	Café de Oro: .0001 Other: .0001
Make household economic decisions on his/her own	47%	18%	41%	18%	Café de Oro: .0003 Other: .0001
Make coffee related decisions on his/her own	42%	32%	43%	61%	4-way: .0004 Café de Oro: Not significant Other: .0009
Widowed/single head of household	33%	7%	26%	13%	Café de Oro: .0001 Other: .0001
Average coffee production	450 kilos	621 kilos	242 kilos	287 kilos	
Own no milpa	62%	43%	42%	21%	4-way: .0004 Café de Oro: .0273 Other: .0001
Received training/support for coffee rust	89%	54%	44%	35%	4-way: .0001 Café de Oro: .0001 Other: Not significant
Renovating/treating for rust	21%	28%	62%	67%	Café de Oro: Not significant Other: Not significant

Variable	Café de Oro Women (72)	Café de Oro Men (68)	Women Members (178)	Men Members (171)	Significance
Served on board of directors within last 3 years	36%	57%	16%	44%	4-way: .0029 Café de Oro: .0173 Other: .0001
Feel (somewhat) uncomfortable voicing opinion during meetings	54%	46%	33%	16%	4-way: .0001 Café de Oro: Not significant Other: .0005
Missed one or more of last five meetings	63%	49%	29%	29%	4-way: .0001 Café de Oro: Not significant Other: Not significant
Walk alone to most distant coffee plot	17%	59%	32%	57%	4-way: .0051 Café de Oro: .0004 Other: .0163
In favor of women's coffee programs	97%	96%	56%	57%	4-way: .0001 Café de Oro: Not significant Other: Not significant
Does your cooperative offer special services or programs for women	56%	85%	6%	13%	4-way: .0001 Café de Oro: .0001 Other: .0194

Land Ownership and Other Agricultural Assets

Most coffee producer associations require members to own their own land. In fact, many women reported to us that the rise in women's coffee production and organizational membership in Oaxaca is directly correlated with changing land ownership practices. As one female Café de Oro member explained, "the number of women has increased because they have land. In my case, it's because my parents gave a little piece to each of their daughters and for others it's because their husbands died. This is what is increasing the number of women (in organizations)." Although Mexican laws are less unfavorable to women land owners than those in many parts of the world, women nonetheless lag far behind men, with the percentage of women landowners at 22 percent nationally (compare USA 13.6%, Brazil 11%; sources: Deere and León 2003, USA data from FAO 2019). In comparison, although women within Café de Oro are landowners, women own less land, and are significantly more likely than male members to own 2.5 hectares of land or less (49% vs. 18%), a rate worse—though results are not statistically significant—than that found among the women of the other four coffee organizations. Women members of Café de Oro and the other four organizations are also significantly more likely to own no land devoted to milpa (beans and corn) production than their male counterparts. As a result, within both groups women report significantly less access to the Procampo agricultural subsidy paid by the federal government, which is determined by the number of hectares planted in corn. However, nearly equal percentages of men and women receive the flat-rate Procafé coffee production subsidy of \$MX1300 from the Mexican government (\$US66.96).

For other assets, research findings also demonstrate that men are significantly more likely to own cargo animals than women (41% vs. 26%, respectively), though the disparity is not statistically significant for Café de Oro members (49% vs. 33%, respectively). Owning cargo animals is an important component of cost-effective coffee production in these mountainous, remote regions where some producers must walk up to three or four hours to reach their coffee fields. These long distances mean that producers who

do not own their own cargo animals must contract others to transport organic fertilizer and harvested cherries to and from their coffee fields, an added expense that further lowers women producers' coffee profit margin.

With respect to credit, there are no significant differences between men and women within either Café de Oro or the remaining four coffee producer organizations. However, significantly more women than men (89% vs. 54%, respectively) within Café de Oro report receiving agricultural training from their producer organization. Women within Café de Oro also report significantly higher rates of agricultural training than the women in the other four coffee producer organizations. Women may be participating in training sessions at higher rates than men within Café de Oro because they have relatively fewer years of coffee production experience and may be less familiar with organic certification regulations. Our data shows that 59 percent of women joined the organization in the last ten years compared to just 14 percent of men.

Economic Decision-Making and Coffee Income

Research on gender and agriculture highlights the important correlation between women's agricultural production and their control over household income and increased decision-making power (Morrison et al. 2007; Kabeer 2005). As the smart economics agenda stresses, this has important implications for their children's well-being and long-term poverty reduction: a study across multiple developing countries showed that women spend on average 90 percent of their income supporting family needs whereas men devote only 40 percent of their own income to the same (FAO 2011). Women coffee producers in Oaxaca do report higher rates of economic decision-making power and control over income than their male counterparts do. However, the rates for women members of Café de Oro are not significantly higher than those reported by the members of the other four coffee producer organizations. Among the members of Café de Oro, women are significantly more likely to report that they retain sole control over their coffee earnings (40% of women compared to only 7% of men) and this is a trend that is consistent among the members of the other four coffee producer organizations. Women in Café de Oro are also significantly more likely to report that they make decisions related to daily household expenses on their own (47% vs. only 18% of men) and this difference is, again, consistent across all coffee producer organizations, with 41 percent of women and 17 percent of men reporting the same. In other words, participation in coffee producer organizations correlates with relatively high rates of economic decision-making power among women.

Certainly, some of this control over income and decision-making power is related to the fact that a higher proportion of women reported being widows or single heads of households. For example, 33 percent of the women within Café de Oro are widowed or live on their own, compared to only 7 percent of men. However, many of the women explained that while they may not have spouses, they do live with their adult sons or sons-in-laws who help pay for household expenses and share decision-making power. Therefore, simply being widowed does not automatically mean that a woman will have sole decision-making power.

The women's relative economic decision-making power in part results from the fact that they receive cash payments from the Mexican government's *Prospera* program (within Café de Oro 73% of women receive *Prospera*). When we presented our research results to a group of Café de Oro producers in January 2016, they confirmed the findings about gendered dimensions of household economic decision-making. As one woman explained, "here the man is a farmer; he doesn't have a monthly salary to give to his wife, and the woman is in control of how to manage the family expenses throughout the year. The woman is the one who takes care of the money. I save it and make decisions, but we talk to each other about how to spend it as well." Another told us, "yes, a man may ask his wife if there is money to hire workers, and the woman will say yes or no." A man responded, "Yeah, we're working in the fields. We don't earn money but we're farming *milpa* (corn and beans) just to eat, to feed the family. The women get the *Prospera* and they're in charge of that." This highlights the fact that it's very difficult to isolate the impacts of economic programs and opportunities, such as women's coffee or cash transfer programs, as these intersect within the household economy.

In general, Café de Oro producers own less coffee land than the members of other organizations; however, the gendered differences are relatively consistent across the samples. Not surprisingly, women also report lower harvests than men: within Café de Oro women's reported harvests are only 72 percent of men's, a rate that rises to 84 percent among the members of the other four coffee producer organizations. Women within Café de Oro also have lower yields than their male counterparts; however, this is not true among the members of the other four coffee producer organizations. On average, women members of Café de Oro own 2.4 ha. of coffee and produced 450 kilos of coffee during the 2014-2015 harvest whereas men own 2.8 ha. of coffee and produced 621 kilos of coffee. At MX\$42.5/kilo (or US\$2.19/kilo, the price paid by Café de Oro during the 2014-2015 production cycle) this translates into an income differential of more than MX\$7,000 (US\$359.83). In summary, while women report high levels of economic decision-making power and control over their earned coffee income, these findings must be tempered by the sobering reality that women own significantly less coffee land and have significantly lower yields than their male counterparts.

Organizational Participation

While analyzing asset gaps, economic decision making, and agricultural practices can provide useful information about gendered dimensions of agricultural production, it's important to also examine cooperative dimensions of socioeconomic life. Women's leadership and active participation in agricultural producer organizations is understandably often used as a proxy measure for the somewhat intangible idea of empowerment. For example, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index includes 'leadership' (comfort speaking in public and membership in producer organizations) as one of its five measurable domains of empowerment.³ Women within Café de Oro are significantly more likely to have served on its board of directors than the women members of other organizations. Qualitative research indicates that many of the Café de Oro communities participate in local politics that involve both communal governance and electoral voting and, therefore, some women in this region have more experience actively participating in community governance.

Café de Oro is relatively rare among coffee producer organizations in Southern Mexico in that it was recently headed by a female president. While it is impossible to prove causation, it may also be true that the presence of a well-respected, female president encouraged more women to become involved in the leadership of daily operations of their local committees. While this sort of leadership is a critical component of gender equity, it does not necessarily translate into gender equity in organizational participation rates. Significantly, only 36 percent of female members reported serving on their local committee's board of directors during the past three years (vs. 57 percent of male members). A similar significant difference in women's participation exists among the members of the other four producer organizations with only 16 percent of women reporting that they have served on the board of directors within the last three years (vs. 44 percent of men members). Furthermore, the long history and high rates of male labor migration in this region might also be a contributing factor.

Additionally, in comparison to the members of the other four coffee producer organizations, both male and female members of Café de Oro were more likely to report that they felt uncomfortable or somewhat uncomfortable voicing their opinion during meetings. However, among the members of the other four coffee producer organizations, women were significantly more likely to report this than men (33% vs. 16%, respectively), whereas this difference was not significant for Café de Oro members. Within Café de Oro, women are more likely to report that they had missed one of the last five organizational meetings (63% vs. only 49% of men). Interestingly, among the members of the other four coffee producer organizations, this gender difference does not exist, with 29 percent of both men and women reporting the same. However, the attendance may result more from local cultural restrictions on women's mobility than a lack of interest in organizational governance: only 17 percent of women members in Café de Oro reported that they walk alone to their most distant coffee plot vs. 59 percent of men. In comparison, 32 percent of the women members of the other four coffee producer organizations reportedly walked alone. Mobility is a fundamental dimension of women's empowerment: it is required to access resources, social networks, and knowledge (Grassi and Hyuer 2015; Radel 2012).

It may be a case of local cultural mores that proscribe women traveling alone to their fields or organizational meetings in different communities. Women's mobility may also be constricted due to the general sense of insecurity in the region, in which some localities have had violent encounters with the municipal seat. In either case, it is difficult for women to serve in leadership positions or even maintain or renovate their coffee plots when confounded by mobility restrictions.

Views of the Women's Coffee Program and Gender Equity Services

As detailed above, Café de Oro has been micro-batching a percentage of the coffee produced by women members and selling it to Allegro Coffee since 2008. The premium that Allegro pays for this high-quality coffee is used to pay the salary of a women's program coordinator. Despite the relative longevity of the women's coffee program, we found that many Café de Oro members, even women in the participating communities, were either not aware of the program or were under the mistaken impression that the price premium would be paid back to individual producers. More men (86%) than women (56%) members were aware of the women's coffee program and some women who were familiar with the program were confused about its aims and operations. For example, during a focus group with women members of Café de Oro one producer explained, "They told us they were going to sell (women's coffee) for a higher price than the men's, but still we receive the same price....they created a women's board of directors, but the money stays with them...they're lending it...I don't know how." Another member commented, "They elected the committee, and they turned the money over to them for them to work with but I still don't know what happened with the money." The employee in charge of gender initiatives within Café de Oro explained to us that the amount of the premium earned through the women's coffee program was so small that they have not been able to fund any large-scale programs with it. Their most successful project is the women's saving groups begun in several communities.

Despite this confusion, there is widespread support among members for this type of initiative: 98 percent of Café de Oro members said they were in favor of women's coffee programs, a significantly higher percentage than the 61 percent of members of the other four coffee producer organizations who said the same. Therefore, although we find little evidence that the women's coffee program is correlated with widespread reductions in agricultural asset gaps among the members of Café de Oro, it is correlated with an openness to gender equity initiatives. When we asked the Café de Oro members the open-ended question, "why are you in favor of this?", 56 percent of women and 35 percent of men responded that it offers economic opportunities and an almost equal percentage said that it *valorizes the work of women* (16% of women vs. 12% of men). However, men were significantly more likely to respond that they were in favor of women's coffee sales because it *promotes gender equality* (36% of men vs. 6% of women) whereas 14 percent of women responded that they favored these sales because *women work harder than men*. No men offered this as a reason.

Despite the members' support for the initiative, qualitative research indicates that in its current format the Café La Dueña (Allegro's branded coffee) women's coffee premium generates very little additional income for the organization and hence its gender programming is limited. In the future, Café de Oro hopes to use the money to implement programs in each of their twenty-five communities, not only the sixteen that actually supply the women's coffee. They are also contemplating the idea of using the premium to fund income diversification projects for all members rather than just women. While a more substantial premium would, of course, be welcomed, the women's programming officer commented that the members also had a real desire to meet directly with the roasters and to learn more about them and coffee commercialization more generally. This desire resonates with Ferguson's (2013) argument that the liberal preoccupation with development as autonomy and independence obscures the fact that many people living precarious lives are actually seeking out relationships of dependence, recognition, and membership—in other words, hoping to gain the necessary knowledge to successfully negotiate new connections.

CONCLUSION

Smart economics programs undertaken within agricultural value chains, such as the women's coffee program explored here, should be scrutinized as forms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that "employ the language and practice of ethics to contain and respond to different kinds of challenges and conflicts generated by their activities" (Dolan and Rajak 2016, 11). The gender agricultural asset gap is a functional component of capitalism and contemporary CSR which promotes the idea that women farmers can be saved through market integration. As demonstrated, there is little evidence that the women's coffee program is correlated with widespread reductions in the agricultural asset gaps experienced by women producers. In fact, the women's coffee program not only fails to close the gender agricultural asset gap among Southern Mexican coffee producers, but in fact relies upon it by using targeted premiums to actively recruit individual women into brand initiatives. In turn, it generates additional profits by commoditizing the unique position of the Oaxacan women coffee farmers who are situated within a complex, yet marketable, intersection of class, ethnic, and gender positionalities.

Despite the fact that the women's coffee program does not appear to reduce agricultural asset gaps or promote gender equality more broadly, it is correlated with an openness to gender equity-related programs and services and slightly higher rates of organizational participation among women members. Interestingly, in explaining why they support these types of programs, members of Café de Oro employed some of the same language that informs the woman coffee farmer construct discussed above, stressing the fact that the program "valorizes the work of women" and in women's own words, "women work harder than men." In other words, this discursive construct is successfully used to negotiate and frame personal and collective identities in ways that make sense within producer communities and corporate boardrooms alike. However, this does not mean that the value chain initiatives the woman coffee farmer discourse inspires successfully dismantle broader structural inequalities and consequently their impact is more symbolic than material. As Agarwal (2014) points out, the problems women farmers face are structural and deep-rooted and need to be addressed specifically through the redistribution of productive assets such as land and inputs and the redirection of state services to cater better to the needs of women farmers.

Furthermore, programs such as these are designed to 'help' specific, and limited, groups of women. This is a strategy that will most likely only be successful for those groups who are able to produce high-quality coffee that is already certified organic and/or fair trade. In order to participate in micro-batching programs, coffee producers would have to be relatively well capitalized and own their own dry mills in order to ensure crop to cup traceability. Given that there are already several high-profile women's coffees on the specialty market (e.g., Café Feminino, Café La Dueña, and Peet's Las Hermanas), there may not be much room for new entries. It's difficult to imagine that these types of micro-batching programs could be scaled up to meet the significant needs of women coffee producers as a whole. There is also a danger of 'gender washing' with this type of approach and the coffee sold might be 'women's coffee' in name only. As Li (2014) suggests, we should be suspect of policies that endorse the intensification of capitalist relations as a path toward poverty reduction and social movements that promote development alternatives that serve only a select group of the world's rural inhabitants.

The data and analysis presented in this article answer calls for business anthropology to more explicitly investigate social relations and systems of power when comparing social forms of business organizations and the diverse cultures that shape them. The intersectional approach employed here is a useful tool for examining the individual lived experience of the complex interplay of power, influence, and social relations impacting the interactions of businesses and transnational value chains. It is particularly useful for researching 'smart economics' programs which, by their very nature, universalize women's experiences within broader narratives of global economic development, empowerment, and cultural change. Women's coffee programs are designed to support and empower a generic woman, yet, as demonstrated, women coffee farmers' experiences are particular to their own lived realities and intersecting positionalities within a larger nexus of class, racial, ethnic, and national identities.

ENDNOTES

1. For example, see: Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (2007-2010); Applying Gender Action Plan Lessons: A Three Year Road Map for Gender Mainstreaming 2010-2013; and the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development.
2. Originally, the cooperative also sold this coffee to other smaller coffee roasters (through the importer Sustainable Harvest), but Allegro Coffee is now the only client.
3. The WEAI was developed to track the change in women's empowerment levels that occurs as a direct or indirect result of interventions under Feed the Future, the US government's global hunger and food security initiative. The United States Agency for International Development, International Food Policy Research Institute, and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative collaboratively developed it. Please see <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/utils/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/126937/filename/127148.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2015) for more information

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