Tales from the countryside: Unpacking "passing the environmental buck" as hypocritical practice in the food supply chain

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Abstract

Using a critical power lens and the concept of organisational hypocrisy, we explore how actors across the supply chain have been able to pass risk and responsibility for environmental impacts down the supply chain, in addition to associated economic costs. We use vignettes to relay farmers' experiences and voices, which remain seldom heard in both practice and research. We argue that the main effect of the hypocritical practice of 'passing the environmental buck' is a removal of the farmers' agency, paradoxically coupled with an increase in their responsibilities. We see this approach by large corporations as a mechanism that helps to mask their increasing dependence on this group to achieve their environmental goals.

Keywords: hypocritical practice, food supply chain, power, environmental responsibility

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1. Introduction

This article explores the consequences of organisational hypocrisy. We specifically analyse multinational corporations' (MNCs) hypocritical practices when driving environmental responsibility in their supply chains, and the consequences of such hypocritical practices for the least powerful players in those chains, in our case farmers in the food supply chain. We take reference from Wagner *et al*. (2009) and define corporate hypocrisy as 'the belief that a firm claims to be something that it is not' (p. 79) but also recognise that hypocrisy is 'an inevitable by-product of all virtuous endeavours' (Niebuhr cited in Christensen *et al*., 2013, p. 377). We see hypocrisy as the aspiration to portray a certain image that ultimately results in duplicity through MNCs mediating the implementation of what they conceive as sustainable practices to their suppliers. Therefore, it is the passing of actions to others that we see as the hypocritical behaviour and our paper illuminates the consequences of these actions.

Adopting the concept of corporate hypocrisy in the context of supply chains contributes to an emerging focus on the 'critical' perspectives of building a sustainable supply chain (SSC) and on the political and power-laden dimensions of such efforts. Previous SSC research has found instances of hypocritical practices in different sectors, including precious metals, garments and electronics (Bloomfield, 2017; Soundararajan and Brammer, 2018; Wilhelm *et al*., 2016) and has highlighted how environmental and social requirements are passed onto distant suppliers in different institutional contexts, who often resort to developing coping strategies to deal with these increasing, and often contradictory and unreasonable, requirements. Findings from these studies show that focal firms use their power to pressure suppliers to comply with their sustainability agendas, and give varying levels of support to

those suppliers to achieve these socio-environmental requirements, often without aligning their commercial agenda (i.e. around cost/price reduction), evidencing the mere symbolism or lack of substance of their sustainability claims. The concept of hypocrisy has been implicit in this segment of the SSC literature so far, rather than being explicitly incorporated into a theoretical framing. Previous work has not combined organisational hypocrisy with critical theory, and concepts of power in particular, to explicitly uncover the consequences of hypocritical organisational practices.

The focus of our work is not on the existence of hypocrisy or its role in managing competing demands (e.g. Brunsson, 2007). Rather, our key contribution lies in explicitly exploring the consequences of hypocrisy in the implementation of MNCs' environmental practices in supply chains.

Taking a critical stance, we explore how actors have been able to pass risks and responsibility for environmental practices down food the supply chain. We refer to this as 'passing the environmental buck'. Focusing on these hypocritical practices, which have often remained concealed from public knowledge, we address the following research questions:

RQ1. *How do suppliers experience supply chain requirements to change current production practices to more environmentally friendly ones?*

RQ2. *Why and in what ways is hypocritical practice enacted between MNCs and suppliers in the transition towards more environmentally friendly practices? And what are its consequences?*

In exploring responses to these questions, our work explicitly centres on the lived experiences of farmers, whose perspectives and voices are seldom sought or heard in research on SSCs. Through the stories gathered, we show how they emotionally experience the consequences of MNCs' 'organisational hypocrisy'. In doing so, we question the hypocritical position and the legitimacy of buyer and retailer dominance to invoke change and essentially

pass their responsibility onto others. We show how these hypocritical practices result in a removal of farmers' agency and how hypocrisy may in fact be a self-protection mechanism for large corporations to counter and mask their increasing dependence on farmers to achieve environmental sustainability.

We contribute to the current literature in two ways. First, we explore SSC practices from the suppliers' perspective rather than the buyers' perspective, which has been dominant in the literature. Second, we make a conceptual contribution to the theory of organisational hypocrisy and its implications in a SSC context. We discuss how the notion of hypocritical practice can be refined by using a power lens and how this constitutes a fruitful way to understand changes and challenges to traditional supply chain governance around sustainability issues, particularly as MNCs still tend to be perceived as the main change agents in SSCs. The framing of environmental supply chain practices through a corporate hypocrisy lens is especially important to uncover the emotional consequences for those required to initiate such practices. It has also been central to illuminating the removal of agency and the use of resistance in SSCs. Conceptually, this can help reframe SSC management as a struggle, and can offer insights into supply chains as sites of human action and resistance. Such reframing and insights will help to balance the more rationalist accounts of implementation that currently dominate.

2. CSR initiatives in supply chains

2.1 CSR vs. corporate sustainability: conceptual clarification

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) encompasses the policies and the practices of private businesses that show their commitment both to reducing their negative impacts and to creating societal and environmental value (McCarthy, 2017). The benefits (and consequences) achieved when adopting such socially responsible behaviours go beyond the boundaries of the firm and involve wider communities. Christensen *et al*. (2013) argue that CSR is not an accurate account

of reality but an 'aspirational talk' that shows the ambition of companies to become socially responsible. Such aspirational talk can achieve performativity because it creates corporate commitment as well as public expectations; however, it can also end up as merely a discourse with no definitive action.

While some authors contend that CSR and corporate sustainability are two distinct concepts (for an excellent account of the similarities and distinctions between these fields, see Bansal & Song, 2017), others argue that there are overlaps. Montiel (2008) sees the concepts as converging because of shared environmental, economic and social concerns. Quarshie *et al*. (2016) suggest that the differing interpretations of each of the concepts of CSR and corporate sustainability make it difficult to draw exact boundaries between the two and clearly define how they relate to one another, and they argue that the concepts certainly overlap in the supply chain management (SCM) literature.

We take reference from Quarshie *et al*. (2016) in identifying overlaps between CSR and sustainable production and consumption, namely the links between corporate environmental responsibility and corporate attempts to drive environmental strategies, for example around the protection of natural resources, reducing energy use and mitigating climate change. Therefore, we argue that while they are distinct concepts, CSR is an important strategic approach to building sustainable practices in organisations.

2.2 Socio-environmental CSR in supply chains: evidence of hypocritical practice

Our work aligns with the current thinking in the field of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) that 'the vast majority of research and practice regarding sustainable supply chains (SSCs) has followed an instrumental logic, which has led firms and supply chain managers to place economic interests ahead of environmental and social interests' (Montabon *et al.*, 2016, p. 11). This highlights very clearly the discrepancy between corporate claims on

sustainability and their actual outcomes, which have so far enabled little progress towards true sustainability. We recognise that there is in fact no such thing as a truly SSC (Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014). Supply chains, particularly food supply chains, have a deep impact on the environment, as they are the central global way of organising the exploitation of natural resources to serve consumption (Srivastava, 2007). We therefore see the context of corporations' attempts to drive sustainability in their supply chains as particularly fruitful to investigate hypocritical practice.

A significant body of literature has emerged over the last three decades investigating various facets of the transition to sustainability in supply chains. The power imbalances in driving these agendas have been researched, and it has been shown that asymmetric power structures do strongly influence the implementation of focal firms' social and environmental requirements (Wilhelm *et al.*, 2016; Touboulic *et al*., 2014). Several literature reviews have shown that the field remains dominated by a large-firm perspective (e.g. Quarshie *et al.*, 2016) and recent contributions have called for more critical approaches (Matthews *et al*., 2016), in particular the exposure of the inconsistencies between discourse and actions (McCarthy *et al*., 2018). Large firms use their purchasing power to push their environmental and social practices onto their suppliers, especially small firms, across the supply chain (Glover *et al*., 2014), leaving these firms with little alternative but to comply.

Previous research has explored the instrumentalism of such corporate sustainability strategies in the context of food supply chains (McCarthy *et al*., 2018) and in particular the way in which the power dynamics characterising food supply chains provide opportunities for large corporations to dictate the meaning of the sustainability agenda for farmers (e.g. Clapp & Fuchs, 2009). We are not aware, however, of specific contributions explicitly framing this issue as hypocritical practice in this context.

Furthermore, there is a need to explore the consequences of such hypocritical practices given that instances of coping strategies have been uncovered, and more specifically covert practices, on the part of suppliers (e.g. doublebook-keeping) to ensure compliance with MNCs' sustainability requirements (Huq *et al*., 2014). Other research has drawn on concepts from behavioural economics (Soundararajan & Brammer, 2016) and from institutional work (Soundararajan *et al.*, 2018) to explore 'unsustainable' and 'evasive' micro-practices at the supplier level in extended multi-tier supply chains, and has revealed how suppliers cope with the social requirements of buyers. Two studies (Soundararajan & Brammer, 2018; Wilhelm *et al*., 2016) have shown that focal firms were pushing the responsibility onto intermediaries, which in turn passed on requirements to sub-suppliers, illustrating the discursive and material power exerted by the focal firms. The fundamental contradictions between commercial and socio-environmental agendas mean that suppliers find themselves in resource-constrained situations and, as a result, may hold negative perceptions, which in turn affects their behaviour (lack of compliance, resistance, etc.). These micro-practices, i.e. supplier (in)action, can in fact be viewed as a direct consequence of organisational hypocrisy of the large buyers in these chains. These findings not only evidence the existence of hypocrisy in supply chains as a misalignment between claims and actions but also show that hypocrisy emerges in contexts where tensions and contradictions exist, and as an organised way to handle such tensions (Brunsson, 2007; Boiral, 2007; Cho *et al*., 2015).

Interestingly, the importance of power in shaping actions and behaviours around CSR in supply chains is acknowledged by several authors (e.g. McCarthy *et al*., 2018; Wilhelm *et al*., 2016; Touboulic *et al*., 2014) but it has received relatively little attention conceptually. This is all the more surprising given (a) the emphasis on imbalanced power relations in the literature on global value chains and their role (e.g. Nelson & Tallontire, 2014 Prieto-Carron, 2008) and (b) the fact that 'change for sustainability is likely to involve a strategic discursive process of

elaboration and implementation, in which power and resistance play an inherent part (Foucault, 1980; Thomas *et al*., 2010)' (Touboulic & Walker, 2016, p. 329). Given the evident dearth of research on the suppliers' perspective of change for sustainability in supply chains, and the central role of power dynamics in this process of change, we feel that there is an opportunity to add to the field by unpacking the existence, enacting and consequences of hypocritical practice in supply chains.

3. Conceptualising the relationship between organisational hypocrisy, CSR and supply chains: a critical power lens

There is a general agreement that hypocrisy refers to inconsistencies between talk or discourse and action. It is a concept that is particularly relevant to the domain of CSR and corporate sustainability, where scholars have investigated issues such as *greenwashing* (e.g. Siano *et al*., 2017). We draw on critical theory to understand the consequences of organisational hypocrisy arising from corporate attempts to drive environmental practices in food supply chains.

We specifically question the objectification of farmers through MNCs' implementation of practices as part of their environmental CSR. Following Fournier and Grey (2000) we endeavour to reveal the discursive nexus between knowledge and power as it manifests in both the organisation and the wider systems in which the organisation operates; by doing so, we are able to illuminate how socio-economic systems of inequality and exploitation are manifested in organisational hypocrisy.

3.1 CSR and hypocrisy: a critical theory lens

Critical scholars have been ambivalent about CSR (Kazmi *et al*., 2016). Some argue that CSR is merely a smokescreen, concealing the exploitative nature of global capitalism (Banerjee, 2007; Prasad & Holzinger, 2013), and never incorporated into daily organisational behaviour

(Fleming *et al.*, 2013). Others suggest there is potential in CSR to be a source of change in corporate capitalism and possibly contribute to 'critical performativity', viewed as the ongoing process of acting and enacting critical theory, and encouraging a form of management that challenges the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of global capitalism (Adler *et al*., 2007; Kazmi *et al*., 2016).

Prasad and Mills (2010, p. 231) encourage scholars to use critical theory to 'engage in concerted efforts to reveal the problematic deployments of CSR by corporations'. Studies have exposed the 'greenwashing' inherent in most CSR engagements (e.g. Banerjee, 2008; Jones, 2013; Wright *et al*., 2012). Adler *et al*. (2007, p. 144) explain how some researchers have illustrated the corporate practice of 'greenwashing' – namely, how corporations profess to do environmental good yet 'without applying the lessons of environmentalism to their business processes', or simply as a tactic to mislead consumers regarding their environmental practices (Parguel *et al*., 2011). We view greenwashing as one form of organisational hypocrisy whereby the environmental claims made by organisations can be regarded as merely symbolic.

Recent analyses of global capitalism's inequalities (Picketty, 2014) and environmental destruction (Wright & Nyberg, 2015) support scepticism of CSR and associated concepts (Gond & Nyberg, 2016). There has been much interest in the gap between organisations' CSR behaviours and their communicated principles, in particular in the difference between symbolic and substantive actions (Schons & Steinmeier, 2016; Bowen, 2014) and the ability of organisations to 'walk the talk'. It has been widely acknowledged that there exists a decoupling phenomenon whereby corporate hypocrisy manifests itself through a lack of coherence between 'legitimate statement ideas' and 'real activities' (Boiral, 2007, p. 128-129), or indeed outright contradictions between the two. Whether hypocrisy is legitimate or at least condoned is a question of goal hierarchy and political and/or societal acceptance (Christensen *et al.*, 2103; Vogel, 2016, p. 133).

Considering CSR and corporate environmental strategies through an organisational hypocrisy lens can help make sense of the failures of corporate attempts to drive meaningful social and environmental change, and why hypocritical practice helps serve the interest of the powerful, through maintenance of the status quo, resulting in an exacerbation of social inequity and further environmental exploitation. Banerjee (2008) provides a critique of how CSR is invoked as a mechanism by which to sustain the hegemonic authority of corporations at the expense of disenfranchised stakeholders. We argue that this also implies that these corporations use their authority to remove themselves from their own responsibilities in terms of environmental goals and strategies. We extend Banerjee's argument by exploring the hidden practice of passing the responsibilities for reducing an organisation's environmental impact onto others in the supply chain – namely those in dominated positions. Therefore, we address calls from Prasad and Mills (2010) for critical scholars to explore the discursive outcomes of corporate mobilisations of CSR. We take shifting responsibility onto others as a form of mobilisation.

According to Cho *et al.* (2015), the concept of organised hypocrisy is an attempt to explain how discrepancies between talk, decisions and actions may allow corporations flexibility in their management of conflicting stakeholder demands (p. 79). Brunsson (2007) argues that organised hypocrisy is simply 'a way of handling conflicts' between values, ideas and/or people, 'by reflecting them in inconsistencies among talk, decisions, and actions' (p. 115). This is particularly relevant when considering the increased attention paid to understanding the paradoxical nature of corporate sustainability and the ways in which the actors involved deal with conflicting demands (Hahn *et al.*, 2015). Organisations' CSR primarily engages them in various forms of impression management to promote positive audience perceptions (Carlos & Lewis, 2018, p. 133). Arguably hypocrisy can form part of this impression management through aspirational talk and its assistance in channelling

organisational socio-environmental practices (Christensen *et al*., 2013). This form of hypocrisy may extend beyond the organisation and become channelled onto others across a supply chain, for example suppliers. In line with Christensen *et al.* (2013), we are specifically interested in the performative nature of corporate CSR claims and communication, and recognise that discourse is constitutive of organisation, in that it creates ways of organising. In this sense, 'CSR communication is aspirational and may instigate organisational reality rather than describe it' (Christensen *et al.*, 2013, p. 373).

Less attention has been devoted to how power is embedded in processes of organising hypocritical legitimacy (e.g. Watson & Sheikh, 2008) and how this moves responsibility from one actor to another. These tensions are ever present in supply chains, and food supply chains in particular (Touboulic *et al*., 2014, Cox & Chicksand, 2007, Hingley & Lindgreen, 2010), and we contend that the power structures inherent in our context are a fertile ground for organisational hypocritical practice.

3.2 Power and power structures as enablers of hypocritical practice

Power is a significant, yet relative, concept for understanding contemporary buyer–supplier relationships (Caniëls & Gelderman, 2007). It is often viewed as the ability of a party to influence its partner's decision-making (Gaski, 1984), which in turn emanates from that partner's dependence on the other party (Ryu *et al*., 2008).

Supply chain research that has considered power as resource dependence has shown that power asymmetry is often in favour of larger firms, which are then able to gain a higher proportion of the benefits available within the supply chain, while bearing less of the risk (Cox & Chicksand, 2007; Hoejmose *et al*., 2013; Marshall *et al.*, 2019; Touboulic, *et al*., 2014). Similarly, research on global value chains has pointed to the phenomenon of 'buyer-drivenness', whereby a relatively small number of Western manufacturers and retailers govern

global value chains (Prieto-Carron, 2008). Researchers have also shown how these large players' social and environmental pursuits merely constitute alternative attempts to control the value chains.

A focus on ideational sources of power stresses its normative dimension and highlights an organisation's ability to influence the framing of political issues. This perspective highlights that, via the exercise of discursive power, organisations can organise 'some definitions of issues […] into politics while other definitions are organised out' (Hajer 1995, p. 42). This conceptualisation of power resonates with a Foucauldian perspective in linking discursive practices and power, and in acknowledging that actors are embedded in systems of power relations and themselves contribute to the (re)production of these power relations through language and actions (McCarthy, 2017). It is therefore possible to see linkages between the concept of organisational hypocrisy and power, particularly in relation to CSR and corporate sustainability discourse.

A critical power lens can serve to explain how discursive practices of CSR, which construct what is legitimate and possible (Phillips & Hardy, 2002), are deployed by powerful players in supply chains to reinforce their dominant position. In this way, focal firms construct an instrumental sustainability imaginary in which they dictate and control the very meaning of sustainability and thereby the actions and contributions of other players in the achievement of this imaginary (McCarthy *et al.*, 2018). There are both material and emotional consequences to organisational hypocrisy of environmental CSR, not least because of the associated costs to transitioning to more environmentally friendly practices that get passed onto other players. Additionally, combining a power lens and the concept of organisational hypocrisy allows for the recognition of agency and resistance. We follow Mumby (2005) in seeing resistance as human agency, i.e. 'acting otherwise', which serves in its interaction with power and control to locally produce organisational and inter-organisational meaning and practices. In particular,

the lived experiences of suppliers give insights into responses to the enactment of organisational hypocrisy as practices of 'everyday resistance', which can be conceived as a more informal yet still organised form of resistance 'entangled with everyday power' (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016, p. 418). If the view is taken that it is 'at the micro-level of experience that the effects of power are felt' (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 684), it is critical to gain an understanding of the various ways in which individuals struggle to deal with hypocritical practice. This will involve understanding how actors, such as suppliers, receive, transform, appropriate and even reject the discursive and material practices (Mumby, 2005) of environmental CSR. In this way, we offer a counter-perspective to the dominant view in SSCM that the suppliers are passive and objects to be changed (McCarthy *et al.*, 2018), and instead we provide a platform for their voices to be heard.

4. Research Approach

4.1 Setting the scene: socio-political context of environmental sustainability in food supply chains

The context in which this research was conducted is characterised by deeply entrenched power disparities that inevitably result in tensions when it comes to considering the environmental sustainability agenda. Although political discourse is currently dominated by a commitment to free trade, with its accompanying discourse around trade liberalisation, comparative advantage and 'level playing fields', the food sector is characterised by large-scale concentration and centralisation, both political and economic (Lang, 1999, p. 169). Financial risks have been passed along the chain to ensure the continuous supply of cheap food and the retention of profit margins in certain pockets of the supply chain (Burch *et al.*, 2013). These practices have been implemented in a context where primary food producers, which we refer to as farmers, are already under pressure to increase their productivity ('doing more with less'), for example

pressure from the sustainable intensification movement and political pressure (Pretty *et al*., 2018). This has created a 'perfect storm' for a food production system that is unsustainable in the long term, given the increased emphasis on the environmental and social implications of production.

Within food supply chains, farmers' practices vary greatly as a result of their own values, aims, knowledge and projects, in addition to natural constraints, the specific conditions of the farm enterprise, the technology used, labour invested and other factors (Glover & Reay, 2015;. These different practices will ultimately require different management and alternative systems of food production. However, beyond the farm, farmers are embedded in the global food system and as such will experience similar institutional arrangements despite their varying individual practices. These institutional arrangements can be especially complicated and difficult for small farms when, because they have a weak position in the supply chain, they have the environmental responsibilities of others pushed onto them. This is in fact becoming ever more challenging as farmers face incompatible discourses on food and farming put forward not only by MNCs but also by governments. An example of such conflicting discourse comes from the UK Government when it stated its commitment to sustainable food production combined with an equal (or even greater) commitment to globalisation (McMahon, 2002). As such, economic policies often undermine any environmental ones (McMahon, 2002).

Currently, the top 200 groups worldwide have combined food and drink sales of £700 billion – broadly half the world's food market (Lang, 1999, p. 180). We cannot detach the push for more sustainable practices in food supply chains from this context. From an environmental point of view, there are concerns over the degradation of soil, nitrate levels in water, the over-use of water and reductions in the area of fertile land, as well as general issues over the scarcity of ecological resources (Burger *et al*., 2009), which have prompted regulatory and voluntary pressures for corrective and preventive action.

In terms of corporate voluntary actions, MNCs' drive to make socio-environmental CSR commitments has translated into material practices, including CSR reporting, the multiplication of audits and codes of conduct, and the inclusion of environmental and social requirements into supplier contracts, but also an increase in eco-labelling to provide consumers with assurances of the sustainability of their products. Most of these efforts face externally, and are forms of impression management, as discussed previously. They serve to construct the large food corporations as primary agents of change, while any behaviours that might be deemed to constitute 'misconduct' or to be 'unsustainable' are attributed to their suppliers. The suppliers are merely the recipients of expectations. McCarthy *et al.* (2018) show that Unilever self-identifies as a 'force for good' and constructs its suppliers as objects to be empowered. In their study, the MNC uses its power over suppliers to dictate an instrumental socio-environmental agenda, manifesting itself in efficiency-centred and control-based practices (e.g. quality assurance, yield improvement practices, training and education) that primarily serve to deepen the suppliers' dependence.

4.2 Ethnographic studies

Ethnography is an approach to research, which emphasises the significance of rich moments of 'felt' experience (Symon & Cassell, 2012); it is about understanding the human experience (Cunliffe, 2010). It is 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) 'to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation' (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 540). Ethnography enables researchers to experience farming and the dynamics of food supply chains (Gioia *et al.*, 2012). What differentiates ethnography from other qualitative methods is the length of time the researcher spends with people in their everyday lives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the context of organisations operating across power-driven supply chains,

it has the ability to connect the everyday, mundane reality of organisational life with the broader political and strategic practices of the supply chain (Boyle & Parry, 2007); it allows researchers to get insight into the processes of social settings by getting to know people in their own environments (Emerson *et al.*, 2011).

We take a particular perspective of ethnography in that we undertake a critical ethnography. This is different to other forms of qualitative inquiry in that critical ethnography draws from critical social theory and places power concepts at the centre of its epistemology (Carspecken, 1999; Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002). What we are particularly interested in through our critical lens is how actors across the supply chain have been able to pass risk and responsibility for environmental impacts down the supply chain, as well as economic costs, and how their ability to do so is embedded in social relations involving power.

To prevent this critical approach from being too negative, we look at the *politics of the possible* (see Gibson-Graham, 2008), and set out to explore new practices and possibilities for action. Rather than dismissing alternatives because they might lead to co-option or produce further oppressive power relations and create further paradoxes, we instead see them as offering choices for action and focus on what could be achieved in a future sustainable food supply chain. Our approach is characterised by an ethos of *reflexivity* (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014; Cunliffe, 2010), which is in keeping with our ethnographic approach, and we provide an openly reflexive account of our own relationships with food organisations.

As critical and qualitative researchers, we acknowledge our relationships with and experience of the world of farming. We present in this paper our observations and reflections on practices across food supply chains in the United Kingdom (UK). Both authors have been highly involved in food supply chains in the UK, both at a personal level and as part of a professional research agenda. We have a deeply rooted interest in how these supply chains work and the effects of power on smaller producers. In this way we are able to engage in

cultural reconstruction. Cultural reconstruction requires methodological techniques aimed at producing as closely as possible an insider's position with respect to culture. The emic position of 'insider' serves as a regulative ideal, characterised by acquiring the skill to 'position-take as one's participants do' (Carspecken, 1999, cited in Georgiou & Carspecken, 2002, p. 690). We take a performative attitude to participants and those we observe. Our previous research has involved working with smaller-scale suppliers in situations where they have had to embrace change as a result of contractual obligations. It is these instances where those in less powerful positions appear to be dictated to rather than having buyers work with them on changes in contracts that led us to focus our attention on the role of power and how practices are passed onto these individual businesses. As critical researchers feel compelled to shed light on these somewhat hidden practices in order to engage stakeholders in critical debates about how we should instigate change, in particular in power relations.

Both authors have spent over five years researching food producers. The empirical work drawn on in the present paper was conducted across two different supply chains: one for dairy products, and the other for fruit and vegetables (see Table 1 for details). The dairy study includes insights from ten family farms in the UK, where interviews were conducted with the family members involved in the business. Interviews were completed at the start, middle and end of the ethnographic study; there were 75 interviews in total, each lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. In addition to these interviews, less formal conversations were also documented. In total, there were over 100 hours of observations. . In the context of the fruit and vegetables supply chain, the research involved work on nine farms. Fifteen interviews were conducted with the owners and managers, each lasting between 60 and 120 minutes. In addition, two full-day workshops were held with the farmers. The repeated farm visits represented 50 hours of observations. In both cases, we were able to witness the farmers' relationships with the focal firms, through meetings and interactions (e.g. visits, phone conversations) that happened at the

farm, as well as through participation in meetings that were organised by the focal firm with the suppliers. We also had access to documents relating to the farming operations and the environmental CSR strategies. We sought to tease out the contextual information around the business and its commercial relationships and around the environmental agenda; we were interested in the relational dynamics and history between the farmers and their buyers. We wanted an understanding of the business operations (the people involved, their interactions, their daily activities and decisions) and business structure, as well as of the farmers' perceptions of key challenges and their hopes for the future.

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4.3 Presentation of findings and analysis: vignettes and reflexivity

We were each embedded in these two contexts separately but have come together through our mutual interest in farming narratives. In particular, we realised that we had had privileged access to farmers' personal stories and experiences, and that across our two contexts common issues and themes were emerging. We were also very conscious of the fact that the stories and experiences that we had gathered and witnessed were particularly under-represented in the discourse on sustainability in food supply chains. Farmers are often just there as objects and we were keen to find a way to do justice to their voices. As qualitative researchers we also view ourselves as narrators (Denzin, 2008) and it is through our narratives of the field that we showcase our sensemaking and represent our findings. We have chosen to use vignettes to provide snapshots that capture key elements of the experiences we underwent in the field, or, as McCarthy (2017) puts it, 'windows into worlds'.

We weave our analysis into the vignettes to allow us to explore the different layers of experience, and as a means through which we can connect with the complexity of the issues

around power, corporate sustainability agendas and buyer–supplier relationships. We see this approach very much in line with Marcos and Denyer's (2012) consideration of 'spaces for collaborative dialogue' and reflexive writing practices. Such spaces address the shortcomings of exclusively using individuals' accounts on the one hand and collective accounts on the other. The principal shortcoming of individual accounts is that they can appear 'sometimes to be too narcissistic and self-indulgent, ignoring the need for a sensitivity to context and surroundings' (Ripamonti *et al*., 2016) and would fail to capture the embeddedness of our work. We, as Neimanis and Walker (2014) have done, incorporate our own creative writing into our stories. Such writing has the potential to disrupt and challenge the discourses of conscious purpose of most managerial and academic engagements with corporate environmentalism (Gaya & Phillips, 2016, p. 818).

The vignettes presented in the next section draw on our entire empirical work and combine different voices and stories to make sense of interactions and moments of action, to connect readers to the everyday experience of the research participants and the researchers (Cunliffe, 2010). As described above, each of us was embedded in the field of farming for several years as part of separate studies. We are in fact both still very much actively researching food supply chains and as such remain connected to this context in our current empirical work. The data from which the vignettes below have been constructed were gathered between 2010 and 2016. Field notes, thick descriptions and reflexive accounts were written up during and after the fieldwork, yet the vignettes below were specifically developed for this article. They combine several data sources, including previous research findings and writings, and were developed through several iterations, as we have been able to read and comment and reflect on each other's work. They can probably be best conceived of as the results of our shared sensemaking of the salient assumptions and issues regarding the implementation of the environmental CSR agenda in food supply chains.

The vignettes are vivid portrayals (Erickson, 1986) of specific events, for example a conversation (Liu & Maitlis, 2014), a critical moment in the field, or an instance of a particular practice or routine (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2014;. We use this dialogical approach (Chaudhry, 2009), as it allows for the integration of direct quotes and indirect storytelling, as well as for the direct embedding of reflexivity through our interpretations and questioning. In the vignettes that follow we use the first person to capture the unfolding of events as we experienced them and to enable us to tease out some of the sensitive issues around the implementation of environmental requirements in imbalanced supply chains, as well its consequences for those involved, which may often be framed as habitual actions and processes in the SSCM literature. We find it useful to do justice to the experience of those affected, and especially to draw out their emotional reactions in the face of the tensions that they faced. The vignettes also provide a platform for reflective questioning around issues of hypocritical practice and the assumptions of boundary-less responsibility that underpin it (Amaeshi *et al.*, 2007), as well as its consequences from an agency point of view. In using this approach, we re-situate the conversation on sustainable SCs by considering them as 'sites of human action', which emerge through 'the ongoing agency of inter-organisational members' (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 580). Individual agents shape and drive the sustainability agenda, and act according to strong personal values and identities but also to emotions, which make them able to legitimate their actions in contradictory organisational discourses (Wright *et al.*, 2012; Weick *et al.*, 2005).

This decision to use vignettes and to position ourselves as narrators does open up issues regarding our own authoritative power as researchers in our representation and mediation of the participants' stories, voices and experiences through the very construction of the vignettes (Denzin, 2008). It may perhaps be perceived that us making claims about our participants and using their stories as part of our own reflections are acts of 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988). Yet we are making our reflection on power relationships explicit and while we 'used' the voices

of our participants to write these vignettes, we have not 'used' the participants at their expense. Moreover, none of our work was covert; we received full consent to conduct the interviews and ethnographies, and were trusted by the participants. In fact, we were as much as them influenced by the project in the sense that it enabled them to look at their situation differently through our regular meetings and conversations, and it showed us the complex picture of the situation. We have taken great care to reflect upon our representation of the participants and we are clear that we are not speaking for them. We are committed, however, to providing a platform through which their stories and experiences can be heard, in order to allow a 'multiplicity of viewpoints' (Essers, 2009) in the field of SSCM and hence a critical questioning of the dominant discourse.

5. Vignettes

5.1 Vignette 1 – why am I the scapegoat for the dairy industry?

Having spent a number of years researching dairy farming, I present a short story about the trials and tribulations dairy farmers face in relation to achieving sustainable food production and environmentally responsible businesses. My story is based on my observations and conversations with a number of different dairy farmers and highlights the difficulties in adopting sustainable, environmentally responsible practices, as well as the power conundrum. My example focuses on energy use and carbon foot-printing but touches on other areas where farmers face pressures to change their practices. The dairy industry has received its fair share of attention for causing (or seemingly causing) damage to land, emissions from cows and their waste, intensive practices and high energy use, to name but a few.

The farmers were well aware of these challenges and the obligations which are placed upon them and sometimes felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility for things which often they could not control. As one farmer said, 'What can I do if my land is flooded? Am I

responsible for that? How can I account for a month's rainfall in 24 hours? An act of mother nature? I can try to ensure that my animals are safe and that to my best ability I do not pollute the water. I just don't know what we are expected to do. And then I am seen as the person creating this problem through my gas-emitting cows and my farm's carbon emissions, yet I provide Britons with food which they need to survive.' It is interesting that the views this farmer is reporting, on what I call 'blame shifting' as a way to highlight what the responsibilities of others should be rather than focusing on our own responsibilities, often came from what farmers referred to as 'outsiders': people they believe have little knowledge or understanding of farming. As a researcher this is somewhat challenging, as many of these 'outsiders' are the ones telling farmers (through standards, regulations, etc.) how to farm in a certain way. In the dairy supply chain, there is concentration and consolidation in the processing, manufacturing and retailing, whereas at the producer end there is a large number of producers, both big and small. The power of the retailers, which cropped up in so many conversations, has led to the control of farmers' actions by others in the supply chain. As one farmer said, 'I have to do things in a certain way so I have to demonstrate my environmental responsibility but it involves things which are nigh on impossible to measure'. The distribution of power seems to run counter to the distribution of responsibility, whereby the farmers I spoke to felt that they were often powerless to do what they wanted and what they thought were good environmental practices on their farm. Their level of responsibility to document this and comply was high, yet their access to resources was often limited. I saw the problems caused by this concentration of power in terms of the demands made on farmers and their lack of financial resources to deal with additional production requirements and the costs associated with implementing sustainable food production; for example, farmers could buy energy-efficient milk pumps but these had to be compatible with their current milking systems and usually ran into tens of thousands of pounds. Farmers would have liked to have these things but finding

the money was difficult on their tight margins. The power and ability to impose environmentally responsible practices lay with the few. Coupled with this was the issue that milk is a perishable product: it needs to be refrigerated at all times and has a short shelf-life. I found that many of the farmers I spoke to were under pressure from both society and buyers to do things to reduce their carbon footprint, their energy use and pollution, and to increase animal welfare and the biodiversity on their farms, to name a few. Farmers felt as though they were seen as individuals who didn't respect their land or animals, and who wasted precious resources, which in the case of the people I was involved with couldn't have been further from the truth. I spent time with farmers who were passionate about the wildlife on their farms, and who actively encouraged rare species, for example barn owls, marshland birds and small mammals such as the field mouse. I wondered whether the negative portrayal was an intentional ploy by MNCs to retain control, and whether those MNCs had a reason to enforce their own environmentally responsible CSR strategies on their suppliers. Would they have not been better working with the farmers, to use their knowledge, and as a result get a better uptake of environmentally responsible CSR practices? I also wondered whether MNCs communicated what work they were doing with farmers to improve environmental responsibility as a smokescreen to cover up the lack of action on their own part. In relation to energy use (one of the key areas MNCs are trying to influence, to reduce their carbon footprint) it is difficult, from what I have seen 'on-farm', for farmers to make changes, unless they are able to completely change their entire mechanical systems, but this again costs money. They are able to do small things but not achieve the wholesale 'transformative change' being pushed by both policy and buyers. This, to me, highlights the complexity of power over farmers and the ability of others to exercise control, and leaves me wondering exactly how much latitude they have to do their work in a way which they think is best for their farm. I remember a conversation with a farmer who said that he now, as part of his milk contract, had to undertake a carbon audit and submit

this to his milk buyer. One should really question why this is necessary, as how to deal with environmental policy and strategies should be up to each individual farm . He later told me that his buyer had also forced him to have his milk collected every other day and he had to pay for these collections. So he now had to keep larger quantities of milk cooler for longer. I questioned why he thought this was necessary, especially as milk is sold as 'fresh' and many consumers are under the impression that milk is collected daily. He said, 'I think it is so they can reduce their costs and reduce their energy consumption; perhaps it is so that they look better than we do. You know, if they have to do less … they will be using less energy [and] their carbon usage will be different.' He then went on to say, 'I know this sounds a bit "cloak and dagger" but I look at their website and it's all glossy pictures, green, and I think ... how else can they make themselves look better and what easier way than to push it onto us and then blame us for all of the environmental issues in the supply chain?' Again, to me it seemed that the MNCs were wielding their power, imposing practices to bolster their own image of responsibility, and I'm left wondering who would actually challenge this. Do they genuinely think this is the best way to achieve environmental responsibility, or is it easier to say that others are doing badly and they are 'helping' them to change their ways as a smokescreen to hide their own practices?

In spending time in the dairy industry and with farmers, watching, listening and then reflecting on my own questions and piecing together my story, I wondered how many environmental practices across the supply chain were 'hidden' and who was responsible. In fact, it is a responsibility that everyone should take. We should be questioning why big multinationals are using their power to influence practices that should be done, while at the same time moving practices which potentially affect the environment onto others. I was left questioning the morality of their approach given that they, too, should take responsibility for their part of the environmental impact of the supply chain, as well as wondering whether the example the farmer presented above was simply an economic ruse to remove some of the

refrigeration costs and transportation costs from the MNC's balance sheet. There is a double-edged sword to this type of behaviour in the supply chain, as both environmental and economic risks (and associated costs) are moved to those who are in fact the least well placed to deal with them, or those who can least afford to deal with them, given the tight profit margins in milk (a product which is often sold for less than the cost of production). To my mind, this is unethical behaviour that would surely contradict the CSR talk found on the MNC's website. But then, who would believe the farmers if they were to expose these practices?

5.2 Vignette 2 - Boundary-less responsibility, bearing the burden and everyday resistance

For anyone considering the advancement of the green agenda in food supply chains, it would be easy to be rather optimistic, given what has happened in recent years. Initiatives like CDP, now including scope 3 carbon emissions, and like Oxfam's 'Behind the Brands', are emblematic of a broader movement towards the mainstreaming of the sustainability agenda in supply chain discourse. The main point here is that most initiatives looking to drive environmental practices in the supply chain actually nurture this idea of the boundary-less responsibility of MNCs in food supply chains and little is done to actually unpack how this responsibility translates into practice, and particularly how it affects other players in the chain. If one solely relies on the media or even research for that matter, it is easy to have the illusion that these MNCs are not only the champions of environmental initiatives but also the main actors who implement them: the knights in shining armour, if you will. As a researcher in the field of SSCM, I have read many papers, read the stories of our field. Do not get me wrong: I know there are some stories of human behaviours. It is apparent, however, that the dominant story of our field is that of organisations, technology and processes. It is also that of eco-efficiency rather than of the complex transition to ecological resilience. The dominant voices of our research are also those of large multinationals.

And I, too, embarked several years ago on a research journey that was looking at a facet of that dominant story: a story of a large buyer working towards, an environmental agenda for its suppliers, or, rather, imposing one on them. It soon became obvious, though, as I was getting more emerged in the research process and building stronger relationships, that I was not dealing with a large buyer and its suppliers. I was dealing with people. And these people trusted me enough to tell me their stories, share with me their emotions. Through my research journey I met many people, mostly farmers, and in the rest of this vignette I hope to let multiple voices be heard: my voice; the voice of Allan, who worked for the large multinational; the voices of Mike and Rob, who were both third-generation farmers.

I remember when I first met Allan, there was something very positive about his attitude. Allan is of a calm nature; he is very good at making those around him feel relaxed. He sat down with me and said, 'Before the whole sustainability agenda came along, there was little left of interest for me in the business. I wanted to retire. When sustainability suddenly became a big part of my job, everything changed, and I no longer felt like I wanted to retire. I am very excited about this.' I asked him about his role, which seemed to be a bit of a boundary-spanning position, between procurement and agriculture teams and the sustainability team. 'I have been working with farmers for as long as I remember. And that's how I view myself. The title they give me is something like "agricultural sustainability manager". In my view, I am here to make the connection with the farmers. We are on that journey together. I want to take them along with us. I know them all individually. I have visited their farms; more often than not I have spent long hours around the dinner tables.' His eyes glittered and he laughed. 'Many, many years ago, I don't think you were born, I used to go around with packets of our products in the boot of my car to give away to the farmers. And every time I arrived at Suffolk farms, little Mike would run up to me, and would innocently ask what was in my boot. That's how long I

have known these guys. Mike now grows for us. He is the third generation in his family. All this doesn't make me young. But I have never been more enthusiastic.'

I believed in Allan's enthusiasm and I believed that he was genuinely committed to working with the farmers around the green agenda. The extent to which others in his organisation shared his views and passion was yet to be seen, especially as my conversations with some of the buyers included multiple references to the 'tense contractual negotiations' and the fact that the farmers 'don't seem to get' sustainability and it has to be 'shoved down their throats'.

Mike was actually a young farmer, less than 45 years old, while the average age in the profession is over 55. Mike has quite a serious air about him. He has a lot to say: you can tell from the way he leans against the back of his chair and from the look he gives. Before I say anything, he asks, 'Shall I just tell you the story about our relationship with our buyer?' It isn't really a question because he doesn't wait for my answer and immediately kicks off his story. 'We go back a long way, you know, Allan and I. I was only this big [he makes a gesture with his hand] when he was already coming to my father's farm to talk about business and to give us samples. I really appreciate Allan; he is honest, you know. The old generation. He gets what it is to be in farming nowadays. He doesn't treat us like halfwits like the rest of them. But they are from big business so you can't really blame them. They want their people to be sharks and get the best deals. I get it. I get it. But sometimes they need to remember we are people too. And don't get me wrong, I'm not living in the dark ages, but we used to do contracts around a bottle of wine, sitting down somewhere and we would chat… Your word was your word and we would say, "Right, okay, we will do this".' He pauses, sighs. 'But I digress. It's the whole sustainability stuff that we are here to talk about. Well, if you ask me, that's great. I'm glad they are going down that route. They have the resources and maybe now they'll start listening more. Some of us have already done a lot in that area. The whole carbon agenda we get, and if we

can share the learning then that's great. We can take others along with us on that journey. It's good, you know. The buyers, they don't get it though. That's what upsets me. They come in with their price target. Yes, they have the sustainability things at the back of the contract, but they don't care. So you can talk to them all you want about the great things you're doing, like the solar panels on the stores. But I'll keep doing it. It's the bigger picture. These buyers, they come and go. And there is Allan, he listens.'

My interest grew in what actually happens on the farm, and how the commercial and environmental agendas from the same buyers seem disconnected. I visited Rob's farm in Herefordshire. I recall quite vividly my visit to his farm and being shown around the facilities. The primary topic of discussion was carbon reduction and the difficulty of measuring emissions in relation to specific activities. Rob had been asked to complete a carbon measurement tool by his main customer, a large manufacturer, but in relation only to the crop that was sold to them. It was an impossible task. Try separating the electricity consumption according to crops and you can get a sense of what they were grappling with. Some of the most problematic aspects that surfaced during the conversation were about how they then needed to come up with a plan to reduce both their carbon and their water impact. Rob, the owner, explained that over the years they had taken on a lot more activities that used to happen beyond the factory gate, such as washing. They had also made huge investments in facilities to store the crops at the right temperature as a way to ensure consistent quality but also consistent supply: 'They are guiding us down that route and are putting pressure on us to move that way, without having to pay us a great deal more money.' While he saw how these areas could easily be used to demonstrate some easy wins in relation to reductions in water use and carbon emissions, and in this sense represented the 'low-hanging fruits', it was also evident that the resources needed to make changes were not readily available and the manufacturer was in no way going to provide them. He was frustrated by how much he had had to invest over time without seeing changes in his

contract and actually a general reduction in the prices he was paid: ‘All investment in agriculture is upfront investment. Your timeline is so long when you look at the payback. They look at a payback of three years in the factory; for us it's [a] six-year or seven-year payback minimum. And all of that has to be upfront cash.’ Rob’s story and situation are not unique and as I visited more farms, I encountered the same issues. Most mentioned the ‘huge raft of requirements’ imposed by their buyers on environmental issues and they complained that there is never any dialogue: ‘There is never any; it's very dictatorial’.

A year later I got an email from Allan. It wasn't addressed just to me, but also to several people in his organisation as well as some farming consultants. It read: ‘Dear all, I have a meeting with our grower groups next week and I am looking for something that could help with the why we are doing what we are doing? Many still don't get it.’ I met Allan in person soon after. He looked more agitated. ‘It's frustrating at this point. No matter how many times I go around, some of them still don’t get it. They say they’ll fill in the forms because it's me asking. But that's not really the point, is it? I’d like them to get it, take the lead on this, drive the agenda. There’ll be a day that I won't be around anymore, so…’ He didn’t finish the sentence.

Around the same time, I organised a workshop with several of the farmers, including Mike and Rob, to talk about their relationships with their buyers, around the environmental agenda specifically. Mike was strangely quiet during the first part of the workshop, like he was observing the others. But when we got down to talking about their views of the future, he finally shared his thoughts. ‘I have made a drawing of where I see us in the future. Two alternatives really. In an ideal world, I would not have to worry about all this anymore. I'd be sailing on a boat off the coast of Spain; that’s the little boat here [he points to the corner of the page]. The other way is that finally they hear us. I know it's going to sound cheesy and all, but all I want is to feel valued. I don't feel valued as a farmer, as a supplier. I am not entirely sure why I am

doing this any longer.' Next time I talked to Mike was over the phone. I asked him if he'd like to come to a workshop again. He said he'd love to because a lot had happened since the last one. And then he said, 'Actually, I need to ask you if that's okay, if I come, because we don't grow for that multinational any more, you see? So, do you still want me in the room?' I said yes. He came. He looked pleased. He was beaming in fact. 'Best decision we have ever made. It isn't easy coming out of a relationship like this. But another company has offered to partner with us to develop their whole agricultural sustainability agenda. So what they did not want to hear about we will finally be able to share and put in place. We are starting a model farm, you know, exploring more environmentally friendly farming practices.'

Allan was upset clearly. But he didn't let it show too much. He shrugged. 'Maybe it's better this way actually. In fact, they are based in a water-strained region, so over the long term we were going to walk out on growers in that region. It's better that way.' I asked about ending relationships in pursuit of the company's sustainability agenda. 'It's difficult. These are difficult conversations to be had. But as a business we have a responsibility to do it. You know, we can't just be making promises to the growers. The earlier they can change to something else, the better. It's hard though.' He looked thoughtful.

One cannot understand greening efforts in food supply chains by solely looking at MNCs. While great progress is being reported by them, this progress comes at a cost – and not just monetary – to the farmers in these chains. Such stories, however, are seldom told and, when they are, it is often in an attempt to point the fingers at the 'moaning' and 'risk-averse' farmers who are constructed as the main barrier to sustainability in food supply chains.

The reality is that, as with most costly requirements in supply chains, the environmental agenda gets pushed onto actors upstream, who end up being the ones who bear the higher risks and the heaviest resource burden, but who have limited power to do otherwise. In a typical food supply chain, power is skewed in favour of the large manufacturer or retailer, and farmers, if

they want to continue being in business and survive, have limited options but to follow these requirements. The environmental agenda is no different, in that it is essentially part of the continued attempt by the large players to control and govern the supply chain while not having to pay too much for it. Yet the difference is that the large powerful players become increasingly reliant on their suppliers to achieve their environmental and social commitments. How long can this last? Is the case of Mike symbolic of what is to come for the industry? How can these powerful firms assume that farmers will continue to go along with their increasing requirements? Why are they not listening to their ideas? Why are farmers solely viewed as recipients of expectations?

6. Discussion

In the context of corporate SSC practices, institutional pressures to make commitments to environmental and social goals have led to a growing number of large MNCs making promises about sustainability even though their current operations are widely unsustainable. The 'empty' organisational commitments paradoxically open up avenues for activists, NGOs and researchers to expose these MNCs and pressure them to 'walk the talk'. In our vignettes we tell of farmers' lived experiences of the hypocritical behaviour of MNCs in food supply chains. Our vignettes are a platform from which the voices of farmers can be articulated to audiences beyond the farming community. We acknowledge that these voices may in fact be mediated by the way in which we tell these stories, but we also argue that presenting quotations from interviews is a form of evidential mediation, albeit they can also be taken out of context and result in misappropriation. We used these in-depth stories to provide a thorough and credible account of the context in which hypocritical practice exists and the consequences of this practice. The embedded nature of our research means that we, too, have normative values, which transpire in our reflexive accounts.

While the vignettes have provided an invaluable way to convey and do justice to the complexity of the lived experiences of farmers, in this section we seek to position the salient issues emanating from these insights into a more structured conceptual discussion. We tease out the broader implications of our research, as the key aspects we identify help us address our research questions. In this way, we hope to anchor the main theoretical contribution made by our work around the reframing of SSC management as a struggle, which offers insights into supply chains as sites of human action and resistance. In examining environmental supply chain practices through a corporate hypocrisy lens, we have uncovered both material and emotional consequences for suppliers in marginalised positions and show how hypocritical practices lead to the removal of suppliers' agency but also to the use of 'everyday' resistance in SSCs. Our conceptual contribution is encapsulated in Figure 1 and is further elaborated in the rest of this section.

- INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE –

We contend that this push for environmental requirements by MNCs as evidenced in our vignettes is a form of hypocritical practice, as, on the ground, the responsibility for delivering on these environmental promises lies with less powerful players in the chain. In both vignettes there is an evident disconnect between the 'legitimate statement of ideas' put forth by the focal firms and their 'real activities' (Boiral, 2007), and this therefore serves to classify such practice as hypocritical. Using the hypocrisy lens enables us to conceptualise what we have seen and heard, and expose the hypocritical practices large corporations are able to skilfully 'get away with' through power and manipulation in food supply chains. This enables these corporations to pass risk and responsibility, as well as economic costs, for environmental impacts down the supply chain to farmers. This includes, for example, requiring farmers to store and wash vegetables instead of this taking place at the manufacturing site; or storing milk

for collection every other day (rather than every day), so that farmers bear the additional costs and risks of refrigeration or have to pay additional transport costs to have their milk collected. While some may argue, for example, that the collection of milk every other day is an attractive environmental and financial option for buyers, there are environmental and financial implications for every producer who has to keep the extra milk refrigerated for longer. This principle is also true for vegetable storage and washing. These extra burdens on farmers then create inherent tensions with the push for more eco-efficient operations: the farmers bear more of the environmental costs but also face the most pressure to reduce it.

There are indications of the lack of alignment between the commercial and CSR agendas in the focal firms, and organisational hypocrisy appears to emerge in a context where there are inconsistencies and unresolved tensions (Brunsson, 2007). Yet in our research we find that the fertile conditions for organisational hypocritical practices to emerge lie in a power paradox. Our empirical insights reveal that the imbalanced power structures in food supply chains enable MNCs to dominate the agenda and impose their view of what environmental sustainability consists of. By making environmental requirements a condition of their relationships with farmers, there also appears to be an ever-increasing resource dependence, furthering the power imbalance (Touboulic *et al.*, 2014). Arguably, the existence of imbalanced power structures provides fertile ground for organisational hypocrisy, as the dominant players are able to dictate the agenda in an instrumental fashion. This adds to the findings from McCarthy *et al.* (2018), who unpack the existence of CSR instrumentalism. In line with the work of Prasad and Mills (2010), we are interested in the outcomes of these 'discursive corporate mobilisations of CSR'. Our findings contribute to the hypocrisy debates by showing how power is used to enforce changes in practice in supply chains but also, more importantly, how responsibilities are shifted.

When reflecting on our findings, we are left wondering whether the hypocritical practices of large focal firms in the supply chain may in fact be seen as a way of masking and countering their increasing resource dependence on the suppliers of raw materials to achieve their own environmental and social goals (Touboulic *et al*., 2014). Indeed, these firms do not have direct access to or control over the environmental and social resources and conditions that they are pressured to and commit to 'improve'. These firms therefore mobilise discursive practices, as well as the material aspects of the transfer of responsibility described previously, to construct the subject position of suppliers as 'bad' in order for they themselves to be constructed as 'helping'. This resonates with the work of McCarthy *et al*. (2018). Through this construction of the 'bad' farmers, the firms are able to objectify them (i.e. they are the recipients of expectations) and remove their agency, hence maintaining their perceived power position. Our work has shown that the hypocritical practice of 'passing the environmental buck' goes hand in hand with the removal of the agency of farmers. This is effected by the lack of consultation with the farmers on the sustainability agenda, even by the most well-intentioned parties in the MNCs. Their expertise in and understanding of environmental issues are 'organised out' (Hajer, 1995) in both vignettes.

In identifying the objectification of suppliers, we contribute to the debates in the SCM literature surrounding changing practices (e.g. Wolf, 2011) and the issues of power and influence in food supply chains (e.g. Clapp, 2014), and also extend the conceptualisation of organisational hypocrisy. Organisational hypocrisy and power can be viewed as being intrinsically linked, and the former provides a self-protection mechanism in light of the loss of the latter. Our work evidences the existence of both discursive and material power (e.g. Fuchs & Glaab, 2010) and contributes to the organisational hypocrisy literature by evidencing the link between loss of power and resource dependence, as well as the emergence and enacting of hypocrisy in a supply chain context.

In our vignettes we point to the consequences of hypocritical practice for those who are the recipients of contradictory ever-increasing requirements. In particular, we are able to identify two types of consequences: emotional and material. The resource requirements and pressures placed on farmers and their businesses are what we refer to as material consequences. While these are relatively unsurprising, given the research on the increasing requirements placed on upstream suppliers (see e.g. Huq *et al.*, 2014), the emotional aspects are less widely acknowledged. These were evident in this research. Participants expressed strong emotions about the topic itself, about their positions (change in responsibility, ability to deal with issues, etc.) and about the nature and evolution of the relationships with the other stakeholders. Emotions transpired in every stage of the research and form an integral part of the way stakeholders make sense of sustainability. Emotions at the collective level were salient in meetings but also when individuals discussed or reacted to others' actions or statements. There is a continuous negotiation process at play in transitioning to environmental practices both within and outside an organisation's boundaries. The cultural shift associated with the implementation of environmental and social practices in an operations and supply chain context is bound to lead to highly equivocal situations and multiple moments of misunderstanding between the stakeholders involved. The resulting confrontations of viewpoints give rise to clear displays of emotions, as do the conflicts, tensions and disagreements reported in our vignettes. Confusion can emanate from the multiple 'versions' of sustainability thrown at stakeholders and there is often a perception of fragmentation, which is sometimes used to question the need to actually change and which foments resisting behaviours.

While the subject of emotion and 'emotionology' (Wright & Nyberg, 2012) has received increased attention in the field of organisational studies and CSR, much of the SCM literature has provided largely rational accounts of the implementation of environmental and social initiatives. Nonetheless, it is unsurprising that emotional aspects have emerged as a key

finding, given the relevance of emotionology 'in organisational settings where social issues of high emotional import become a source of business concern, resulting in the allocation of resources and expertise', like environmental and social challenges (Wright & Nyberg, 2012, p. 1565). In this sense, emotions are relevant to an understanding of organisation-level practices, such as environmental CSR commitments, as firms attempt to situate themselves in relation to broader societal emotionology around these questions and gain public acceptance by doing so. Emotions are equally interesting to explore at the micro (individual) level, as personal engagement with environmental and social initiatives is often seen as requiring emotional commitment.

Emotions are central to organisational settings in their relation not only to the construction of subjects and identities (Wright & Nyberg, 2012, p. 1562) but also to the organisational change implied by CSR agendas, which in turn relates to sensemaking. Change and sensemaking are inherently political (Hope, 2010) and closely interlinked with power. The work of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) has complemented sensemaking theory by describing the interplay between sensemaking and sensegiving in organisational change. While dominant parties may attempt to frame and legitimate the process in a certain way, i.e. sensegiving (e.g. the adoption of new language, types of events), change 'recipients' will develop their own interpretations (Hope, 2010). Hence, change outcomes are affected by how people make sense of change initiatives. Authors have operationalised sensemaking in different ways around the premise that it is a primarily cognitive and conative process, i.e. related to what people know about an issue (or perceive they know) and how they behave in relation to that issue (e.g. Basu & Palazzo, 2008). Little attention has been paid to the affective aspects of sensemaking (Bartunek *et al.*, 1999). Actors not only share their intentions and thinking but also their feelings.

Our findings corroborate the view that there is a power play in sensegiving and sensemaking processes and that they are not simply cognitive: emotions are important factors informing stakeholders' sensemaking (Bartunek *et al*., 1999; Weick *et al*., 2005). Social and environmental CSR is associated with strong feelings, and these affect how stakeholders view their role in the change process, perceive what is acceptable and unacceptable, and understand each other. Hence, emotions have an impact on the way supply chain relationships are or need to be reshaped to address sustainability. As described in the vignettes, the focal firms' discursive and material practices served to objectify the suppliers and remove their agency. Yet our accounts of their emotional experiences (e.g. anxieties, frustration, nostalgia, etc.) are testimony to their agency and help to reframe their identities as fully engaged emotional subjects rather than passive objects. Our study contributes to a rehumanised account of inter-organisational environmental CSR transformations, and to illustrating the affective processes of sensemaking (Weick *et al*., 2005).

We align with and add to recent work that has considered the micro-processes at play in the implementation of environmental and social requirements in global supply chains (Huq *et al.*, 2014; Soundararajan & Brown, 2016; Soundararajan & Brammer, 2018; Soundararajan *et al*., 2018). We in fact show, in line with these works, that farmers found coping mechanisms and even resisted the requirements placed on them; in an extreme case, one participant ended his long-standing relationship with the focal firm because of the inconsistencies between its talk and its actions, i.e. hypocrisy. Beyond this example, our work resonates with studies that have considered instances of everyday resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Thomas & Davies, 2005). In unpacking the emotional consequences of hypocritical practice in the supply chain context, we provide insights into the micro-level experiences at which power is felt (Thomas & Davies, 2005). There is evidence that the suppliers, as individuals, engaged in routine struggles in relation to the environmental agendas, through both discursive and material

forms of resistance. For example, we noticed the mobilisation of the environmental discourse in their reassertion of their identities in relation to nature ('we are custodians of the countryside') and in their own definitions of environmental sustainability. Everyday resistance was also embodied by suppliers paying lip-service to the environmental requirements of the focal firm, for example by returning partially completed carbon measurement questionnaires. In more subtle ways, the language, postures and gestures used by the suppliers in relation to the focal firms during meetings collectively represented a challenge to the focal firms' individual managers.

While we recognise the urgency of environmental problems and the need to address them at all stages of food production (highlighted by Pullman *et al.*, 2009), we contribute to calls for research to critique CSR (see Banerjee, 2008) and question the way in which the sustainability agenda is currently being pursued by leveraging the power imbalances that shape supply chains. These pursuits by large corporations are in fact, as highlighted in our work, creating even more unstable and unsustainable food supply chains as the risk–rewards of economic theory appear to be enacted in reverse for farmers, who face higher risks but lower returns. Yet this behaviour is seen as a legitimised form of hypocrisy.

Both vignettes shed light on some of these practices (practices that of course never appear in CSR publicity or promotion, and which we therefore refer to as 'hidden'). Consumers in particular may never experience farming in an un-mediated manner, i.e. outside the context of large players' corporate rhetoric and media stories, and therefore remain disconnected from the way in which their food is produced. Our deep accounts of what happens on farms give a very problematic outlook for food production in the UK. In constructing the large manufacturers and retailers as the primary players in the environmental agenda, we perpetuate the disconnect between food production and consumption and further reduce the agency of farmers in this context. Much research in the area of SSCM, and in relation to food in particular,

remains stuck at the level of focal firms in supply chains (Quarshie *et al*., 2016) and therefore fails to unveil the reality of practices for all players in the chain.

7. Implications for research and practice

The consequences of hypocrisy and the conceptual discussion we present may guide future research to exploring hypocritical practices in other contexts. We focus on environmental requirements in this article and future research should endeavour to shed light on organised hypocrisy around social initiatives. Globalisation exacerbates irresponsibility, in the form of, for example, the use of slave labour and environmental derogation (New, 2015). Hence it would be fruitful to add to our work and uncover how the misalignment of buying fims' commercial and social agendas plays out in globalised production networks. Research into modern slavery in supply chains would be worth considering in this respect (New, 2015).

Our context is characterised by specific power structures and our work took place in the UK. It would be interesting to explore contexts in which such structures differ and how this affects the feasibility of MNCs' environmental strategies. Future research should further explore the consequences of hypocrisy through the different levels of hypocritical practices, from the individual to the organisation, the supply chain and society. Efforts in this space to continue to conceptually reframe SSCM as struggle would be especially fruitful. In addition, the link between loss of power and organisational hypocrisy as a self-protection mechanism would deserve further investigation. Deeper exploration of the affective processes at play around the deployment social and environmental CSR strategies in global supply chains would be particularly useful. Considering the affective processes from a sensemaking perspective can facilitate understanding of the role of values in organisations (Weick *et al*., 2005). Our work has highlighted linkages between sustainability as organisational change, power, hypocrisy and emotional sensemaking, which deserve further empirical and conceptual exploration. We

particularly see promising avenues for future research in refining our understanding of issues of agency and resistance as emotional processes in relation to attempts to ensure corporate sustainability in global supply chains. This will involve inquiries into the experiences of those who are traditionally marginalised in these chains, and not usually represented in practice or research. And, like McCarthy *et al*. (2018) and McCarthy (2017), we encourage such endeavours that seek to provide platforms for unheard voices rather than that simply continue to make assumptions regarding what is best for them.

We anticipate that this will translate into the use of engaged research approaches, where researchers embrace the 'the politics of the possible' and set out to explore new practices for action and embed reflexivity in their research. This may also lead to different ways of writing, as we have attempted in this paper, that do justice to the lived experiences of research participants and where the content and process of the research become more closely aligned (see e.g. Marshall, 2008). Such endeavours will be especially welcome in the field of SSCM, where research has tended to reproduce the patterns observed in practice, i.e. top-down and rationalist (Pagell & Shevchenko, 2014). We see a great role for researchers to play in the struggle for SSCM through their own agency and activism. As Marx pointed out 'the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it' (Marx, 1976, p. 574). This is especially relevant for a field such as ours, which deals with issues of social and environmental justice and equity, and which needs research to be the critical authority that challenges (rather than legitimises) existing exploitative power structures that benefit only a few (Rhodes *et al*., 2018). Our engagement alongside the farmers has shaped our engaged research agenda and opened collaborations with farming and rural communities as well as researchers across various disciplines in order to challenge the status quo, to promote public engagement around the question of the future of agriculture, and to influence policy.

Finally, there are clear practical implications from our research. There is a need for MNCs and in particular CSR/sustainability managers first to acknowledge the limits of their rationalist and dictatorial approaches to implementing environmental practices in their supply chains, because such approaches inevitably result in resistance. The 'human' aspects of these endeavours need to be placed at the forefront. Considerations of both the material and the emotional consequences of changing their suppliers' practices may reduce the levels of resistance they encounter. It may also assist in creating a more genuine commitment from both the MNC and the supplier to the creation of practices which deliver action rather than just talk. We also suggest that policy-makers have to bear some of the responsibility of the present system because they have introduced regulations that focus on ever-greater productivity. There is most definitely a need to take stock of the myriad voluntary actions expected of farmers and the myriad regulatory requirements placed on them as food producers, given that the intrinsic tensions that exist between them is a fertile ground for hypocritical practice to emerge. All these pursuits are in fact creating a highly irresponsible, unsustainable food system, where responsibility is compounded in one part of the supply chain, while other actors, including consumers, successfully negate or remove their own responsibilities by 'passing the buck' to farmers. There are, therefore, additional practical implications in terms of policy development but also for all of us, as food consumers.

8. Conclusion

In this paper we contribute to exploring the consequences of hypocrisy; in doing so, we also contribute to research applying a critical power lens to CSR (e.g. Prasad & Mills, 2010). We do this by critically exploring environmental practices across food supply chains. What we found was rather poignant - the hidden practice and consequences of what we refer to as 'passing the environmental buck'. By passing these environmental risks, powerful players in

supply chains are also able to pass financial risk and costs down the supply chain. Through our embedded empirical work, we have shared and witnessed the lived experiences of the farmers who are at the receiving end of these requirements, and we offer insights into supply chains as sites of human action and resistance (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Foucault, 1980; Touboulic & Walker, 2016). There are lessons to be taken from our work for dominant players, as their well-meaning façade will inevitably crack in the long term and as their dependence on farmers increases. Providing spaces for meaningful engagement across the supply chain would be a starting point.

We would like to highlight the importance of questioning the morality and ethics of these practices and the role of other actors across the supply chain in taking their own responsibility for environmental risks. It is easy to 'pass the buck' to others in the supply chain, especially to farmers, thus removing any obligations for action. We all play a role in creating the unsustainable production and consumption systems in which we live in and only when we all take responsibility we will be able to change the future of these systems.

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Table 1 – Farmer participants

Dairy					
	Description	**Ownership**	**Size**	**Profile of participants**	**N interviews**
Farm 1	90 cows producing 875,000 litres of milk, relatively small in scale, farm 200 acres of owned and rented land	Private - Family	Small	Male and female – over 50 years old	6
Farm 2	250 cows producing 1,800,00 litres of milk, farm 300 acres of predominantly owned land, renting just 20 acres	Private - Family	Small	Male and female – over 60 years old Male – over 30 years old	12
Farm 3	Farm 3 750 cows producing 6,400,000 litres of milk, farms 2280 acres owned, 150 acres rented	Private - Family	Medium	Male and female – over 40 years old Male and female – over 50 years old Male – over 20 years old	15
Farm 4	Farm 4 80 cows producing 700,000 litres of milk, farm 300 acres, 245 owned, the rest rented. Also grow own cereals on an organic system	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 40 years old Female – over 30 years old	6
Farm 5	Farm 5 690 cows, producing 1,800,000 litres of milk, farm 750 acres, half owned half rented	Private - Family	Medium	Male – over 60 years old Female – over 50 years old Male – over 30 years old Male – over 20 years old Female – over 20 years old	14

Farm 6	Farm 6 120 cows, producing 900,000 litres of milk, farm 250 acres, 150 owned and 100 rented	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 50 years old Female – over 40 years old	6
Farm 7	Farm 7 80 cows, producing 600,000 litres of milk, farm 140 acres all owned	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 60 years old	3
Farm 8	Farm 8 100 cows producing 850,000 litres of milk, farm 190 acres all rented	Private - Family	Small	Male and female – over 40 years old	4
Farm 9	Farm 9 175 cows, producing 1,500,000 litres of milk, farm 300 acres 200 owned and 100 rented	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 60 years old Female – over 50 years old	6
Farm 10	Farm 10 65 cows, producing 500,000 litres of milk, farm 120 acres all rented	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 30 years old	3
Fruits and Vegetables					
Farm 1	Merchant, grower supplier and packer of root vegetables	Private - Family	Medium	Male – over 60 years old Male – over 40 years old	2
Farm 2	Local vegetable and cereal farm	Private - Family	Micro	Male – over 40 years old	2
Farm 3	Vegetable and cereal farming group	Private	Medium	Male – over 40 years old Male – over 40 years old	2
Farm 4	Vegetable and cereal farm	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 60 years old Male – over 40 years old	2
Farm 5	Vegetable and cereal farm and merchant	Private	Small	Male – over 50 years old	2

Farm 6	Growers of root vegetables – head of regional grower group	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 50 years old	2
Farm 7	Vegetable farm and packers	Private - Family	Medium	Male – over 50 years old	1
Farm 8	Fruits suppliers and merchants	Private	Small	Male – over 50 years old	1
Farm 9	Fruit producers	Private - Family	Small	Male – over 50 years old	1