

The Diverse Economy: Feminism, Capitalocentrism and Postcapitalist Futures

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Introduction

Feminist economic geography has been a rich site for exploring issues of political economy and gender. In this chapter we explore the contributions of one increasingly influential school of thought within the feminist economic geography tradition: diverse economies. Building on the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham, the concept of diverse economies informs the work of others in the ‘Community Economies Collective’ and the ‘Community Economies Research Network’ – international collaborative networks of researchers who share an interest in theorizing, discussing, representing and ultimately enacting new visions of economy (CEC 2009). Gibson-Graham’s work is grounded in empirical research, but has major implications for how we conceptualise the economy and our roles within it. The starting point for this reconceptualisation comes with a critical questioning of ‘the economy’ as we know it today.

It is only in modern times that ‘the economy’ started to be described as a closed system, operating according to internal laws of the kind referred to every day in financial journalism: laws of supply and demand, the ‘need’ for competition under the free market, and prosperity founded on growth. Most of this colloquial discussion of the economy assumes that what it is referred to as ‘the economy’ is simply an ontological fact. A critical historical view, however,

reveals the economy as first and foremost an idea, that came into being in its contemporary form in the 1930s and 1950s (Mitchell 1998, 91). With time, accepted beliefs about what the economy is and how it operates, have come to seem natural and inevitable.

In more recent decades ‘the economy’ has begun to stand in for ‘the global capitalist economy’ which is seen to function in a particular way and adhere to a set of predictable laws. Not included in this vision of the global capitalist economy are a proliferation of livelihood activities that, when they are acknowledged at all, are usually represented as small, local, and (often) dying anomalies, doomed attempts at ‘alternative’ modes of economic exchange, or failed ideologies that were simply not ‘economically viable’: subsistence farming, alternative currencies, and the welfare state are just some examples. For scholars and activists critical of the global capitalist economy – or indeed the millions of people whose livelihoods depend on these ‘anomalies’ – this vision of how the economy works leaves very little room to manoeuvre.

For J.K. Gibson-Graham and other writers in the Community Economies Collective (of which we three authors are members), this habit of viewing economic practices in terms of an assumed dominance of global capitalism needs to be challenged. We argue that such discourses of ‘the economy’ serve to strengthen the presumed dominance, and hence naturalness and inevitability, of global capitalism, and to diminish the worth of other ways of making livelihoods. Gibson-Graham offer a feminist analysis of the economy that proposes a very different way of viewing the “relations of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services”(Mitchell, 1998, 91) through which human communities secure their livelihoods.

In this chapter we outline some of the core conceptual contributions of diverse economies approaches. We begin with the core critique that much economic discourse is ‘Capitalocentric’ and discuss the feminist philosophy that informs this foundational argument. We then outline an alternative way of comprehending the economy in its already existing multiplicity and diversity. We discuss some of the analytical tools J.K. Gibson-Graham propose for ‘learning to see differently’. These ‘tools’ make visible already existing economic diversity. The diverse economies framework, which we introduce in section 4, offers a systematic schema for describing this newly visible diverse economic landscape. We then turn to the way that re-presenting the economy as diverse entails a process of resubjectification, in which understandings of our own position in the economy can shift. Using examples from the community economies literature we outline how resubjectification can provide the starting point for building postcapitalist possibilities. Finally we discuss examples of emerging work that deliberately focus on community economies of the kind we wish to foster. Through a range of place-based approaches, these studies of community economies seek to both analyse and *enact* new visions of economy.

1. Capitalocentrism

Gibson-Graham’s rethink of the economy is founded upon feminist critiques of patriarchal society. A cornerstone of this work is Irigaray’s critique of phallocentrism. The phallocentrism of patriarchal societies places male knowledge and experience as the ‘norm’, and relegates female knowledge and experience to the realm of the Other (along with heterogeneous ‘Others’ of the dominant Western world). Yet, these Others are precisely what give masculinity its identity – they are the “lack” against which masculine presence becomes recognizable. Women (and many Others) play the negative in the phallocentric dialectic

(Smith 1992, Irigaray 1985).

Gibson-Graham observe that the dominant discourse of capitalism can be understood to operate in much the same way as dominant phallogentric discourses, and have coined the term 'Capitalocentrism' to capture this. For Gibson-Graham, capitalism is too often left unquestioned as "the quintessential economic form" (1996, 7): it is represented as following 'natural laws' of the market and as the inevitable and best way to order economic relations and modes of production. Capitalism is framed as the hero of industrial development and the pinnacle of social evolution. It is supposed to be capable of bringing an end to scarcity, challenging traditional social distinctions, and (although prone to crisis) allowing markets to establish economic equilibrium. Capitalism is the phallus or 'master term'" (1996, 8) around which everything else revolves: human activity becomes the commodity of labour; households become spaces of 'capitalist consumption' and 'social reproduction', rather than noncapitalist spaces of production and consumption.

What Gibson-Graham's analysis reveals is that Capitalocentrism is not only a tendency of dominant neo-liberal or neo-classical representations of the economy, but is also common to discourses that seek to *challenge* global capitalism. Even those in opposing ideological camps come to speak the same language – representing capitalism in a monstrous form, the supremely dominant system of global industrial capitalism that has displaced and/or diminished all alternatives. These representations effectively work to disempower resistance movements. They position capitalism as the monster and non-capitalism, plus any range of alternative or traditional economic formations, as the mouse. Yes, there may be alternatives out there, the story goes, but they are small and local and therefore unimportant. Not only are they deemed unimportant, but they are seen to inevitably contribute to

capitalism, through the subsumption of unpaid work, care, and commons by the means of production. In this totalizing purity test, anything that touches or is touched by the contagion of capitalism, must in fact be capitalist. This narrative seems to characterise the neoliberal rhetoric of the IMF as much as it shapes the rhetoric of those who would oppose them.

Positioning economic alternatives in the role of an ineffectual minority has real world effects. Borrowing from feminist analyses of phallogentrism, Gibson-Graham argues that these discourses work to render the struggle against capitalism unwinnable. The constant repetitious laments against the evils of global capitalism (the inequities it produces, the exploitative relations it necessitates) are intended to incite us to revolt against capitalism, but in fact the constant referral to the ‘monster’ serves to reinforce our belief in its power and thus to cement our own powerlessness to act against it.

Gibson-Graham seek to shift the paradigm by considering the fact that ‘more hours of labor (over the life-course of individuals) are spent in noncapitalist activity’ (Gibson-Graham 2006, 12-13). They ask us to envision what happens when noncapitalism is reframed as ubiquitous, and what might be revealed if we attended to the diversity of economic practices , rather than always telling the same old story of capitalism’s dominance and the insufficiencies of everything else. How might we cultivate ways of seeing things differently?

2. The Christmas Effect

In achieving this task of ‘learning to see differently’ and avoiding the repetition of Capitalocentric discourses, Eve Sedgwick’s analysis of ‘the Christmas Effect’ has provided a helpful first step. Sedgwick notes how at Christmas time, a multiplicity of things – religion, state, capital, advertising, ideology, domesticity, discourses of power and legitimacy – ‘line

up with each other so neatly once a year' (Sedgwick 1993, 6). This lining up can be depressing and alienating for those of us who do not 'belong', who cannot enjoy Christmas. Sedgwick compares this with the way in which gender, sex and sexuality are 'lined up' to erase diversity and the 'queer'. Gibson-Graham identify a similarly constraining 'Christmas effect' in economic and social theory, particularly around the concept of a 'capitalist society'. Gibson-Graham writes of a moment in a conference where she first noticed this:

The researchers had set out to produce a rich and differentiated set of stories about industrial and community change, but they ended up showing how households and communities accommodated to changes in the industrial sectors. In their papers things not only *lined up with* but *revolved around* industry, producing a unified social representation centred on a capitalist economy (the sort of thing that's called "capitalist society" in both everyday and academic discussion) (Gibson-Graham 1996, xxxviii).

Even in this critical scholarly work everything lined up as an effect of capitalism, as if no social or economic phenomena can escape the presence of capitalism as a dominant explanatory variable. To explore this effect further Roelvink (2016) uses the example of constellations in the night sky: once you have had one pointed out to you, you constantly seek it out, blocking out or ignoring thousands of other stars just to focus on the few that fit together to make 'Orion'. Likewise, we block out or ignore or trivialise a multiplicity of diverse economic interactions in order to point out a particular constellation named 'capitalism' or 'capitalist society'. For our observations and descriptions of the world to make sense, be heard in conferences and seminars, or draw nodding approval from colleagues – it is often safer to keep our sights fixed what can be commonly recognised.

Sedgwick's reflections on the Christmas effect and gender are productive however, as she suggests that we might be able to frame and represent societies (and economies) differently.

She asks:

What if ...there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other? What if the richest junctures weren't the ones where *everything means the same thing*? (Sedgwick 1993, 6).

In *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*, Gibson-Graham takes up Sedgwick's challenge and asks it with reference to their own history of representing capitalism:

What if we were to depict social existence at loose ends with itself, in Sedgwick's terms, rather than producing social representations in which everything is part of the same complex and therefore ultimately "means the same thing" (e.g. capitalist hegemony)? What might be the advantages of representing a rich and prolific display? (Gibson-Graham 1996, xxxix)

Inspired by Sedgwick, Gibson-Graham set out first to show that representing capitalism as a monolith and totality works to shut down other possibilities, and second, to represent economies and societies as 'nonhegemonic formations', where economy, polity, culture and subjectivity do *not* have to reinforce each other. The goal of this new form of nonhegemonic representation would be to 'queer' capitalism, to make other possibilities for economies and societies more substantial and definitive, to move away from a habitual representation of the economy as caught in a binary relationship between capitalism and noncapitalism. Gibson-Graham's usage expands a critical practice of queering beyond a re-evaluation attentive to sexuality or gender. As Haraway recognises, "queering has the job of undoing 'normal' categories" (2008, xxiv) and this has consequences and entails "coming to know our obligations to each other in all their impossibility and necessity, across species and in communion (2008, xxv). In this context 'queering' is about re-reading capitalism for that which does not fit a hetero-normative masculinist rendering of economy. Queering the economy opens up other modes of

explanation and other economic formations deserving of our affective investment.

3. Revealing diverse practices

In place of the Capitalocentric perspective critiqued in *The End of Capitalism*, in her follow up text, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006), Gibson-Graham proposes a radically different way of representing economies and societies. With the goal of making visible the many thriving noncapitalist practices in existence, Gibson-Graham propose that we represent the economy as a realm of diverse economic practices. The project of highlighting diversity is not about building up whole picture alternatives to capitalism. In the same way that Sedgwick wants to move away from binary understandings of sexuality, Gibson-Graham seek to move away from a binary understanding of the economy. The first step in revealing the diverse economic practices that make up the economy is to open up the definition of economic activity.

Capitalism's 'others' are ubiquitous and diverse, and that very ubiquity and diversity is a resource for change. The same could be said of women in second wave feminism (Gibson-Graham 2006). Gibson-Graham was inspired by the punctiform spatiality of second wave feminism, which exploded the scales of social change by considering the radical potential of women as a dispersed collective. The maxim of second wave feminism, "the personal is political," is the result of small dispersed collectives of women (in book groups, consciousness raising circles, and friendship) learning together to think, feel, and act differently as women. In every space they inhabited, at work, school, and home, women began to perform a different kind of womanhood and this (along with major policy changes) changed those places. This punctiform politics activated the "dots" and connected them under the banner of feminism. Bringing this perspective to economic politics, offers clues for

politicizing the economic diversity *already* in our midst. The main task then becomes the work of bringing this diversity into view.

A popular and useful image for reimagining the economy has been the ‘The iceberg’ (Figure 1). In this image, the Community Economies Collective (CEC) imagine the economy as an iceberg, where what is usually regarded as “the economy” (wage labor, producing for a market, in a capitalism firm) ‘comprises but a small subset of the activities by which we produce, exchange and distribute values’(Gibson-Graham 2006, 69). In this image, the CEC render visible activities that are often obscured, particularly those that are sometimes thought of as ‘women’s work’.

Figure 1: The diverse economy iceberg



Image Source: Drawn by Ken Byrne for www.communityeconomies.org

The Community Economies Collective often use this image pedagogically to communicate to others the positive multiplicity of ‘noncapitalism’, as a first step towards understanding capitalism as just ‘one particular set of economic relations situated in a vast sea of economic activity’ (Gibson-Graham 2006, 70). The image of the iceberg facilitates a reframing, and re-imagining of the economy through a visual description of existing diversity. Gibson-Graham seeks to ‘proliferate difference’ in the economic landscape, and question the ‘hegemonic Capitalocentric dynamics’ on which capitalism’s supposed naturalness or naturalised dominance is based (2006, 71).

In addition to considering diverse economic activities, the Community Economies Collective is concerned with rendering visible unacknowledged spaces of economic productivity. One stream of research has sought to reframe the household. The concept of social reproduction does not adequately capture the productivity and heterogeneity of household labour, and a narrow focusing on household (reproduction) and capitalist (production) leaves other economic interactions unexplored. Pavlovskaya’s (2004) research on household provisioning in Moscow goes a long way to show just how diverse and multiple household economies are in post-socialist Russia. Morrow and Dombroski (2015) revisit the concept of social reproduction, to ask how it might be oriented toward the (re)production of other economies and activist projects. As Mitchell, Marston and Katz (2004) have observed, capitalism’s total dependency on social reproduction might be leveraged to push other economic realities and subjectivities into being. Excising social reproduction from the phallogocentric dialectic of capitalist production opens up the possibility that households might do a bit more than scrape by and reproduce the material and ideological conditions for capitalist production.

Not only are household activities remaking the economy, they are a substantial economic force in their own right. Safri and Graham (2010) take up this line of thought through the concept of the global household. Migrant households have long been positioned as the “victims” of global capital, forced to pick up and leave after their home economy has been destroyed by colonialism, uneven development, currency devaluation, privatization, market failure, bad governance, the list goes on. In global “care chains” migrant households are torn apart, as majority world mothers toil away as nannies or healthcare workers in the minority world (Pratt 2012). The global household offers a different lens, rather than presuming middle class norms of proximity and family intimacy (Pratt 2013, McKay 2006), it offers the possibility that a household or family may be more ‘global’ than ‘local’, and that the flows of remittances, investment, love, and debt may create new possibilities in ‘home economies’. Safri and Graham demonstrate that the global household, in its aggregate size, financial impact, and contribution to international production; and in its current and potential roles in globalization, development, and economic transformation, is “a cornerstone institution in a feminist, postcapitalist international political economy” (2010, 118). Noncapitalist economic practices can be witnessed beyond the household as well, once we learn how to see and categorize them.

4. Diverse economies framework

How then, do we fill in the detail of the positive multiplicity that is noncapitalism? In the same way, Gibson-Graham offer an alternative economic language based around diverse economy, beginning with an openness or emptiness and filling the space with a set of categories only loosely connected with a ‘dynamics’ of contingency, overdetermination, and ethical practice. This poststructuralist reading for difference in the economic landscape is the basis of what is known as the Diverse Economies Framework (figure 2).

Figure 2: A Diverse Economy

TRANSACTIONS	LABOUR	ENTERPRISE
<i>MARKET</i>	<i>WAGE</i>	<i>CAPITALIST</i>
<i>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</i> Sale of public goods Ethical “fair-trade” markets Local trading systems Alternative currencies Underground market Co-op exchange Informal markets Barter	<i>ALTERNATIVE PAID</i> Cooperative Self-employed Reciprocal labour In-kind Work for welfare Indentured	<i>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</i> Nonprofit State enterprise Green capitalist Socially responsible firm
<i>NONMARKET</i> Household flows Gift-giving State Allocations State appropriations Gleaning Hunting fishing gathering Theft/poaching Indigenous exchange	<i>UNPAID</i> Housework Family Care Neighbourhood work Self-provisioning Labour Volunteer Slave Labour	<i>NONCAPITALIST</i> Communal Feudal Independent Slave

Source: Gibson-Graham, 2006, 71.

The ‘empty’ framework, as shown in Figure 2, offers a set of categories and concepts – a language – researchers can use when attempting to describe or ‘map’ the economic landscape. Gibson-Graham’s first example in *A Postcapitalist Politics* is a mapping of the childcare ‘sector’.

Figure 3: The diverse economy of child care

TRANSACTIONS	LABOUR	ENTERPRISE
<p>MARKET Domestic service market Child-care market</p>	<p>WAGE Hired housekeeper Worker in corporate childcare centre</p>	<p>CAPITALIST Body-hire agency, e.g. Dial an Angel Inc. Work-based child-care centre Capitalist child-care centre</p>
<p>ALTERNATIVE MARKET <i>Local trading systems</i> Child care offered on LETS network <i>Alternative Currencies</i> Baby-sitting club (hours calculated) <i>Underground Market</i> Cash-in-hand to neighbourhood teens <i>Barter</i> Direct and equivalent exchange of child-care hours</p>	<p>ALTERNATIVE PAID <i>Cooperative</i> Child-care cooperative worker <i>Self-employed</i> Family day-care mother <i>Indentured</i> Domestic Servant who is an overseas contract worker (paid in cash and kind) <i>In-kind</i> Live-in student who does child care in return for room and board</p>	<p>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST <i>Environmental ethic</i> Steiner kindergarten <i>Social ethic</i> Religious kindergarten <i>State enterprise</i> Government funded child-care centre <i>Non-profit</i> Community-based child-care centre</p>
<p>NONMARKET <i>Household flows</i> Parents sharing child care <i>Gift-giving</i> Family and friends offer to baby-sit <i>Indigenous Exchange</i> Child "given" to kin to raise</p>	<p>UNPAID <i>Family Care</i> Care at home by parents and grandparents <i>Volunteer</i> Child care by friends and neighbours <i>Slave Labour</i> Children in debt bondage</p>	<p>NONCAPITALIST <i>Communal</i> Child-care cooperative Communal household <i>Independent</i> Family day-care Parent-carer household <i>Feudal</i> Extended family with obligatory child care</p>

Source: Gibson-Graham 2006, 73.

Rather than emphasising the role of noncapitalist childcare in the reproduction of the capitalist labour force or even the commodification of childcare services, this mapping of the diverse economy of childcare highlights diverse ways in which childcare is performed, and the significance *and diversity* of noncapitalist provisioning. While the dynamics of capitalist reproduction no doubt play out in some parts of the sector, the effect of mapping the sector in this way is to show that *other* non-market dynamics of generation and regeneration are also present. When this mapping strategy is applied to various sectors, particular enterprises, or even individuals, the affectual result is to increase the visibility of the diversity of economic relations already in play, and thus to increase one's belief in the possibilities for different kinds of (noncapitalist) economic dynamics.

The diverse economies framework does not shy away from representing a variety of ethical and unethical practices; it does not censor distasteful noncapitalist economic practices such as indentured or slave labour, theft, bribery and so on. The aim is to show the diversity of forms of power present contemporaneously, as a re-reading of the economy as always already diverse, as full of possibility. But what then do we do with this re-reading, this re-imagining of the economy? How does this mapping and describing exercise work to make change, to work towards *postcapitalism*? In a simple way, the exercise of mapping out the diversity of the economy enables us to identify economic actions we might take as individuals and communities. It helps us identify the ways in which our role in the economy can be – and in fact already is – more than just consumers. It makes visible the ways in which we produce, share, invest, care, and distribute.

5. Resubjectification

Highlighting the diversity of our economic actions invites a moment of resubjectification. In *A Postcapitalist Politics* Gibson-Graham use the idea of the ‘swerve’ to articulate how a process of resubjectification might begin. For Gibson-Graham the persistence of a Capitalocentric perspective places us all as relatively disempowered subjects, who eke out better and worse livelihoods as best we can under the inexorable forces of expanding global capitalism. The options are limited: Rise up in revolution, or tinker mildly at the edges of the monolith (by, for example, purchasing Fair Trade or boycotting the products of particularly exploitative corporations). As Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2013) argue, what has stopped us from changing economic practices so far is the failure to see ourselves as significant actors in the economy. We are too accustomed to seeing ourselves primarily as consumers with limited power in the overall economy apart from making purchasing

decisions. What a vision of an already diverse economy opens up is the possibility that our options as active economic subjects are much more varied. Rather than being positioned as mice *vis à vis* the monster of global capitalism, we may also, simultaneously, be empowered subjects able to take action and direct change with significant implications for our own lives (and beyond). What this requires, in the first instance, is a shift in viewpoint that is not just intellectual but embodied, making the most of what Bennett terms “the spunk and swerve of bodies” (Bennett 2001, 125). A moment where the possibility for new ways of being can begin to emerge, when “bodies swerve away from familiar forms of subjection and towards alternative ways of being” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 14). Mapping our diverse economic actions helps create such moments, it is part of a postcapitalist politics of cultivating new subjects, a resubjectification where we start to see ourselves (and our potentialities) differently in relation to ‘the economy’.

In trying to map the diversity of the economy and identify other ways of being in the economy, we are ‘necessarily involved in a micro-politics of self-transformation, cultivating ourselves and others as subjects who can identify with and undertake community economic projects’ (Gibson-Graham, 2005, p.145). Gibson-Graham take inspiration from the work of women to try and imagine economic resubjectification :

In [the micro-politics of self-transformation] the economic activities and subjectivities of women come to the fore as salient and exemplary on a number of grounds – not only because women as economic subjects are targeted by the contemporary mainstream development agenda, but because they are actively engaged in the hidden and alternative economic activities of the diverse economy, because their traditional economic pursuits often acknowledge sociality and interdependency, and because women worldwide have become economic activists in place-based movements to defend or enhance livelihoods and environments (Gibson-Graham 2005).

The ubiquity of resubjectification sparks a different sort of politics in place, whereby we

are all invited to consider ourselves as part of a global movement to reframe the economy beginning with reframing ourselves as economic actors. This is equally possible amongst urban homesteaders in Boston as it is among mothers working in the informal marketplaces in Northwest China (Morrow and Dombroski 2015, Dombroski 2016b). Crucially, like the feminist consciousness raising projects of the 1970s, this work of re-subjectification is not a solo project, it is something to be learned in common. For example, participating in working bees, community gardeners learn a new relationship with land, food, and labor and come to see themselves as part of a collective (Cameron, Manhood and Pomfrett 2011). Participating in collective decision making Co-op members learn to see themselves as more than employees or consumers and as part of a collective that makes and shares a common (Cornwell 2012). These examples entail radical work that takes place in the everyday. To paraphrase Gibson-Graham (1993), ideal ways to smash capitalism while working at home in your spare time.

6. Politics of becoming in place

The very ubiquity of economic actors in the diverse economy framework invites a different sort of place-based politics of social and economic change. While economic actors are ubiquitous, they are not homogenous and this is partly due to the places in which they find themselves. If we work to map out the diverse economy of a particular place, we begin to show how capitalism is not globally homogenous, and perhaps not even hegemonic in every place. In conversation with the *Women and the Politics of Place* project (Harcourt and Escobar 2005), Gibson-Graham argue for understanding local economies primarily as places, with ‘highly specific economic identities and capacities’ and not just as ‘nodes in a global capitalist system’ (Gibson-Graham 2005, 132). They use place as a way to avoid essentialism, because ‘place is that which is not fully yoked into a system of meaning, not entirely

subsumed to a (global) order; it is that aspect of every site that exists as potentiality' (Gibson-Graham, 2005,132). In this way, place, like the subject, becomes an opening for politics and change.

This focus on place emerges from a feminist concern for the local, the daily, the bodily, the 'place closest in' – a movement away from the abstractified masculinist 'norm' (Longhurst 2001) towards a specific, place-based politics of difference (Harcourt and Escobar 2005). A recent example of this approach is in the development of community based indicators for gender equity in the Pacific (Carnegie et al 2013; McKinnon et al 2016). In this project a place-based approach challenges normative visions of women's economic empowerment that prioritise the advances of women as individualised, profit maximising economic subjects. In contrast, local visions of gender equality recognised women as collective subjects who are embedded in interdependent households and communities, seeking more sufficient ways of living together.

7. Building a community economy

If we are all (becoming) active economic subjects who operate within diverse economies in specific places, who are engaged in a diversity of economic activity which is already more-than-capitalist, then what does that mean for economic change? Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy address this question in their popular book *Take Back the Economy* (2013). Taking as their basic premise that we are all already actors in the economy, and that the economy is made up of a multitude of small decisions, they highlight the degree to which ethics already plays a role in economic decision-making. Gathering together examples from all over the world where people are making decisions for more human-friendly and environmentally-friendly economies, they identify six shared concerns. These concerns are summarised in Box

1.

Box 1: Six shared concerns for economic decision-making

Surviving well – what do we really need to live healthy lives, in ways that do not impinge on others' healthy lives (including the planet).

Distributing surplus – what do we do with what is left over from meeting our survival needs? How to decide what to do with it?

Encountering others – what kinds of relationships do we have with other people and environments as we seek to survive well?

Consuming sustainably – what do we use up in the process of surviving well?

Caring for commons – how do we maintain, restore and replenish our natural, social and intellectual commons?

Investing in future generations – How do we store and use our surplus for the wellbeing of people and planet into the future?

(Adapted from Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013, xiii).

The shared concerns listed above reposition the economy and our own role within it. In an already diverse economy, one in which there is a proliferation of possibility, economic engagement can become a terrain of ethical decision making. As consumers, producers, individuals and collectives with varying abilities to shape the mode of our economic engagement we nevertheless are (re)positioned as active participants in a network of interrelatedness. To varying degrees we can make decisions which shape the form that interrelatedness takes. And the first step is simply to identify what is in the here and now that we might want to foster and proliferate?

Conclusion

Diverse economy approaches bring critical feminist perspectives together with poststructuralism to radically rethink the economy, our role within it, and what possibilities we may create by enacting different kinds of economic relations. While the empirical engagements of diverse economies research extends well beyond questions of gender, a vital starting point for challenging Capitalocentric conceptualisations of economy is the recognition of the presence, validity and value of a (feminine) Other to dominant masculine

modes of production and explanation. The implications of this shift in thinking are far reaching. This chapter has traced the way that revealing the diversity of contemporary economic practices opens up new ways of thinking about how we construct our economy and the role that individuals take within it. In the context of resubjectification, diverse economies opens the possibility that in reconfiguring ourselves as economic subjects we might also begin to reconfigure the world we live in. This thinking is extended through a politics of place-based practice, in which the aggregate effect of small scale local initiatives can be recognised for the value they bring on the global scale (Safri and Graham, 2010; Ireland and McKinnon, 2013). A place-based approach also allows the particularities of local communities, and their values and aspirations, to be valued on their own terms – allowing a multiple pathways toward development, empowerment, or equity to emerge. Finally, the diverse economies approach has given rise to a re-visioning of the economy as a terrain in which we make ethical decisions about how we provide for ourselves and our communities, and in doing so create the possibility to make the economy in new ways. In *Take Back the Economy*, Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy offer a vision for how we might shape a community economy according to a set of ethical coordinates “in which ethical negotiations around our interdependence with each other and our environment are put centre stage” (Gibson-Graham et al, 2013: 13).

Diverse economies researchers are taking up the challenge of exploring and demonstrating how this might be done in a variety of contexts. For example, Cameron (2015) has explored the commitment that community-supported agriculture initiatives in Australia have to maintaining an agricultural commons (see also Cameron 2009, 2010). Similarly, Hill (2011) explores how ethical economic decision making in a government-led local food project in the Philippines is generating social surplus, creating and sustaining commons and

building a community-based food economy (Cameron, Gibson, and Hill 2014). In the area of renewable energy, Cameron and Hicks (2014) discuss the decisions that community-based renewable energy initiatives are making in terms of how they generate and distribute surplus, while Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy (2016) discuss the synergistic relationship between an emerging market for solar technologies and the unexpected uptake of household solar energy in Australia. All these works demonstrate how seemingly small and local initiatives are moving us closer towards a post-carbon future.

In other recent work, CEC writers are taking up the challenges of the recent post-humanist turn. Posthumanism denotes a multifaceted interest in troubling the ontological habit of anthropocentrism that places the ‘human’ at the centre of history, while being attentive to the hybrid and relational nature of what it is to be human (Badmington 2004). Sarah Whatmore (2002), Deborah Bird-Rose (2011), Donna Haraway (1991, 2003) and Jane Bennett (2010) among others urge us to rethink the boundaries of the human body, attend to the primacy of inter-relationality – of the human with the other-than-human and the more-than-human. With this is an obligation to consider and care for the material world. Thus CEC writer Gerda Roelvink (2016) explores the geography of collectives working to transform economies to enable more dignified forms of existence, both for human and more-than-human entities, while in ecological contexts Barron et al. (2015) explore the performative power of naming organisms. Dombroski (2016a) describes a hybrid activist collective of mothers, infants microbes, communication technologies and more, working towards more sustainable hygiene practices within the home environment.

Others continue to explore the types of negotiations that take place in various ‘sectors’ of the economy: Hwang (2013) explores the ‘creative economy’ of rural Western Massachusetts in the US, through the lens of the diverse lived economic experiences of artists and artisans. In

the 'care economy' Morrow and Dombroski (2015) and Dombroski (2016b) explore the diversity of caring labour and provisioning practices in Massachusetts, USA and Qinghai province, China, arguing for a postcapitalist politics of care that begins with what women and other care workers are already doing to negotiate their everyday realities.

This work demonstrates that noncapitalist modes of doing economy are alive and well and that researchers are increasingly using community economies theory to look for and describe them. In recent years, the Community Economies Research Network has expanded to some 200 members, showing the extent to which the work of the Community Economies Collective has gained momentum and impact with researchers in other fields. With roots firmly in a feminist examination of our economic relations, diverse economies approaches are informing the work of scholars from a broad range of disciplines as they investigate and work towards postcapitalist futures.

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