Building Community Economies: Women and the Politics of Place

J.K. Gibson-Graham

Department of Geosciences
University of Massachusetts
Amherst MA, 01003
graham@geo.umass.edu

Department of Human Geography
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
katherine.gibson@anu.edu.au

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Women and the Politics of Place (WPP) is a project of narrating and theorizing a globally emergent form of localized politics—one that is largely *of* if not necessarily *for* women—with the goal of bringing this politics into a new stage of being. What is truly distinctive about WPP is the vision of a *place-based* yet at the same time *global* movement (Osterweil 2004). Indeed this distinctive vision is what first attracted us to the project, for we were already imagining and fostering an economic politics with the same locally rooted yet globally extensive structure. Rather than "waiting for the revolution" to transform a global economy and governance system at the world scale, we were engaging with others to transform local economies *here* and *now*, in an everyday ethical and political practice of constructing "community economies" in the face of globalization.

Women and the Politics of Place can be seen as an offspring of second wave feminism, a movement that arguably gave rise to a distinctive understanding and practice of politics, one that is hinted at though not quite captured in the phrase "the personal is political." Whereas formerly politics was seen to involve large groups of people or small numbers of highly influential individuals organizing to gain power or create change, second wave feminism initiated a politics of local and personal transformation—a "politics of becoming" in Connolly's terms (1999, 57). Feminism linked feminists emotionally and semiotically rather than primarily through organizational ties. Without rejecting the familiar politics of organizing within groups and across space, individual women and collectivities pursued local paths and strategies that were based on avowedly feminist visions and values but were not otherwise connected. The movement achieved global coverage without having to create global institutions, though some of these did indeed come into being. Ubiquity rather than unity was the ground of its globalization.

WPP builds on that ground, extending the idea of a politics of ubiquity by emphasizing its ontological substrate: a vast set of disarticulated "places"—households, social communities, ecosystems, workplaces, organizations, bodies, public arenas, urban spaces, diasporas, regions, occupations—related analogically rather than organically and connected through webs of signification. If *women* are everywhere, *a woman* is always somewhere, and those somewheres are what the project is interested in: places being created, strengthened, defended, augmented, transformed by women. It is as though the identity category, woman, were to be addressed through contextualization or emplacement, and the feminist question had become "What might a politics of the emplacement be?" Not a politics of identity per se, but a politics of the co-production of subjects and places. A politics of becoming in place.

In the political imaginary of WPP, place takes on a specifically political meaning, shedding its connotations of anti-cosmopolitan localism (Agustin, this volume). Place emerges in this imaginary as a site of political activism and social transformation (Belausteguigoitia, this volume) rather than primarily a "home ground." Women are associated with place not because they are home-based or place-bound but because of their inaugural and continuing role in shaping a new politics. Over the course of more than three decades feminists have inserted issues of the female person and body—the place "closest in"—into political discourses and struggles in their domestic settings, in their communities, and in the national and international political arenas, thereby enlarging the domain of the "political" (Underhill-Sem, this volume). And while global women's movements have devoted much energy to "engendering" global development processes through international conferences and commissions, feminists have not fixated

on the global as the ultimate scale of successful activism (Harcourt, this volume). In confronting imperial globalization, they are continuing their orientation to the local, the daily, the bodily, recognizing that transforming the world involves transforming sites, subjects, and practices worldwide. That this place-oriented activism may involve them in global movements (of migrant workers, for example) is not a contradiction, but simply a confirmation that places are constituted at the crossroads of global forces.

One of the inspirations for the WPP project has been the desire to assert a logic of difference and possibility against the homogenizing tendencies of globalization and the teleological generalities of political economy (Harcourt and Escobar 2002; Dirlik 2002). The vision is that women are both threatened and mobilized by the contemporary wave of globalization, and that they are already everywhere engaged in constructing and revitalizing places, in response to the exigencies and possibilities of their everyday lives. What the project hopes to do is foster this tenacious, dispersed and barely visible "movement," creating connections (networks or "meshworks"), sharing information and inspiration through academic and nonacademic channels, developing local experiments into a collective knowledge that will spawn and support more projects and ideas. Representing this movement and connecting its participants, the project will create a recognized (self)identity for something that already exists, thereby empowering and expanding it.

For J.K. Gibson-Graham, the language of place resonates with our own ongoing attempts to bring into view the diversity of economic practices, to make visible the hidden and alternative economic activities that everywhere abound. If we can begin to see these largely noncapitalist activities as prevalent and viable we may be encouraged to

actively build upon them to transform our local economies (Community Economies Collective 2001). Place signifies the possibility of understanding local economies as *places* with highly specific economic identities and capacities rather than simply as *nodes* in a global capitalist system. In more broadly philosophical and political terms, 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. Place is the "event in space," operating as a "dislocation" with respect to familiar structures and narratives. It is the unmapped and unmoored that allows for new moorings and mappings. Place, like the subject, is the site and spur of becoming, the opening for politics.

In our own work we have been pushed to bridge the separations that define and distinguish places. Continuing to think and write together after graduate school, we have had to constantly negotiate the deep and watery distance between the U.S. and Australia, and perhaps more importantly the social distance between two different continents, nations, communities, and life trajectories. To pursue our work of rethinking and re-enacting economy we have tried to span the gap between the academy and activism, engaging in place-based action research involving both university and community-based researchers/activists. Our action research projects have aimed to recognize and value the distinctive economic capabilities of localities, and to build upon these strengths through nourishing communal economic practices and constructing alternative economic institutions. Along the way we have become increasingly communal in our own practices of production and in our sense of ourselves. In 1992 (after 15 years of working together) we adopted a joint persona, J.K. Gibson-Graham, to honor and encourage our small collective authorial enterprise.

In the rest of this chapter we outline the different aspects of our ongoing project of building community economies in place, highlighting the affinities and overlaps that have brought us to identify with WPP. We see our project as having four principal elements. The first involves deconstructing the hegemony of capitalism to open up a discursive space for the prevalence and diversity of non-capitalist economic activity worldwide (see Gibson-Graham 1996). The second requires producing a language of economic difference to enlarge the economic imaginary, rendering visible and intelligible the diverse and proliferating practices that the preoccupation with capitalism has obscured; we see this language as a necessary contribution to a politics of economic innovation. The third is the difficult process of cultivating subjects (ourselves and others) who can desire and inhabit non-capitalist economic spaces. To frame this cultivation process we step aside from the familiar structural vision of capitalism with its already identified and interested subjects, developing a vision of the "community economy" as an ethical and political space of becoming. In this communal space individual and collective subjects negotiate questions of livelihood and interdependence and (re)construct themselves in the process. Finally, there is the actual practice of building community economies in place. Here we offer two examples of women's activism, one from Kerala province in India and the other involving Filipina migrants working with NGOs with whom we are currently pursuing a collaborative project of action research.

Envisioning a Diverse Economy (A level heading)

Much of our earlier work has been oriented toward destabilizing the epistemological certainties that justify a particular global narrative and authorize a

globally mobilized anti-capitalist politics as the one true path to economic empowerment and transformation (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2002). This has involved repeatedly querying what seem to us grandiose representations of world-scale capitalist penetration and dominion. By undermining the looming capitalist eminence in the foreground of representation, we have attempted to make room for a vision and a self-knowledge of local initiatives—especially non-capitalist economic ones—as powerful and efficacious, not simply a prelude or second best to a global movement or organization.

Arturo Escobar has argued that the project of making the invisible visible, or seeing (in his terms) "non-capitalisms always on the rise," requires a different "politics of reading on our part as analysts, with the concomitant need to contribute to a different politics of representation" (2001, page?). To read a landscape we have always read as capitalist, to read it as a landscape of difference, populated by various capitalist and non-capitalist institutions and practices, is a difficult task, for we must contend not only with our colonized imaginations, but with our beliefs about politics, understandings of power, conceptions of economy and structures of desire. We are all subjects of a capitalist order—in the sense that our understandings *and* our emotions, our personal ambitions *and* our visions of collective possibility are organized around a visceral belief in the hegemonic presence and power of capitalism.

As one way of creating fissures in the imposing edifice of capitalism, we have been elaborating a vision and language of the "diverse economy." A language of economic diversity brings to light what exists in the shadows, disclosing the non-capitalist economic activity that is (everywhere) available to build upon, once we become able to name and see it. This more inclusive economic language harbors heretofore

hidden economic identities that can prompt identification and self-recognition, calling into being collective and individual subjects who can imagine and perform alternative economies.

In undertaking this project we are up against something powerful and pervasive—if not capitalism *per se*, then its prevalent representations. In both mainstream and left discourse the economy is understood as essentially *capitalist*, the productive economic subject is restricted to the positions of wage worker or *capitalist* entrepreneur, and places are either incorporated or incorporable into *capitalist* space. To the extent that economic discourse has a place for economic difference, it locates it in a *capitalocentric* field in which capitalism is the norm and non-capitalist economic relations or entities understood with respect to capitalism, as either the same as, complements to, opposites of or contained within capitalism.

Yet alongside the hegemonic capitalocentric discourse of the economy, there are many counter-discourses of economy that have arisen from alternative strands of economic thinking (for example, classical political economy, economic anthropology, feminist economics, sociology and geography) and from working class, third world, social movement and community activism (for example, the feminist, socialist, cooperative and local sustainability movements). These counter-discourses offer abundant resources that we can draw upon in constructing a language of economic diversity.

The most controversial but also most successful counter to dominant economic thinking has been spearheaded by feminist activists and economists, who point to the huge amount of labor (much of it performed by women) expended on unpaid and non-

market-oriented activities such as housework, child-rearing, volunteering and care for the elderly and infirm (see, for example, Beneria 2003, Brandt 1995, Delphy 1984, Elson 1995, Folbre 1987, 2001, Henderson 1991, Matthaei 2001, Waring 1988).[1] Empirical work on this topic has established that in both rich and poor countries 30-50 percent of economic activity is accounted for by unpaid household labor (Ironmonger 1996, Luxton 1997). There is now a call for the system of national accounts to be revised so that the total measure of economic performance, gross economic product, includes both gross market product *and* gross household product (Ironmonger 1996, 38-9).

A second challenge to the hegemony of the "capitalist economy" is presented by the vast literature on the informal economies of both "less" and "more" developed nations. The pressure to recognize that livelihoods are sustained by a plethora of economic activities that do not take the form of wage labor, commodity production for a market, or capitalist enterprise has largely come from the global "south," though there is increasing evidence of the variety and magnitude of non-capitalist transactions and non-transacted subsistence practices pursued in the developed economies of the "north" (Williams 2004, Emery 2004).[2]

A third language of economic difference comes, perhaps surprisingly, from Marx. In *Capital* Marx foregrounded capitalism against the background of feudal, slave, or independent production as well as the non-exploitative relations he identified with communism. Unfortunately his language of economic difference has been translated into (or mis-interpreted as) an historical stage theory of economic evolution in which capitalism is situated at the pinnacle of development and all other forms of economy represented as pre-capitalist or as (now discredited) post-capitalist alternatives. This

means that we are still under the sway of a systemic conception of economy in which only one form of economy can exist at a time.

Indeed, despite the proliferative energy that continually gives rise to new economic languages, these tend to remain "non-credible alternatives to what exists" (Santos 2004, 238), subsisting in the shadows of mainstream economic thinking. Although feminist interventions, for example, have successfully expanded conceptions of the economy to include as legitimate contributions both paid and unpaid labor, and market and non-market transactions, within the hegemonic framing this vast sea of non-monetized economic activity is still situated as merely supporting the "real" economy, and as ultimately dependent on the determining dynamics of capitalist growth. The idea of independent economic dynamics within household economies, the voluntary sector or neighborhood economies is rendered virtually unthinkable. And the idea of basing a development project on the non-market sector is theoretically and practically speaking "out of bounds."

It is clear that there already exists a substantial understanding of the extent and nature of economic difference. What doesn't exist is a way of convening this knowledge that destabilizes the received wisdom of capitalist dominance and unleashes new creative forces and subjects of economic experimentation. Our intervention is to propose a language of the *diverse economy* as an exploratory practice of thinking economy differently in order to enact different economies. The language of the diverse economy expands our economic vocabulary, widening the identity of the economy to include all of those practices excluded or marginalized by the theory and presumption of capitalist hegemony. Within this language relationships are contingently rather than

deterministically configured, economic value is liberally distributed rather than assigned to certain activities and denied to others, and economic dynamics are potentially proliferated rather than reduced to a small number of governing laws and logics.

Our objective is not to produce a finished and coherent template that maps the economy "as it really is" and presents (to the converted or suggestible) a ready-made "alternative economy." Rather our project is to disarm and dislocate the naturalized hegemony of the capitalist economy and make the space for new economic becomings—ones that we will need to work to produce. If we can recognize a diverse economy we can begin to imagine and create diverse organizations and practices as powerful constituents of an enlivened non-capitalist politics of place.

We begin constructing our language by convening some of the radical diversity of economic relations and conceptualizing them in terms of three practices:[3]

- different kinds of *transaction* and ways of negotiating commensurability
- different types of *labor* and ways compensating it
- different forms of *enterprise* and ways of producing, appropriating and distributing surplus

Our current representation of what we have called the diverse economy is shown in Figure 1. In this figure what is often seen as the *economy*, that is, formal markets, wage labor and capitalist enterprise, is merely one set of cells in a complex matrix of diverse economic relations that sustain livelihoods in communities around the world. Below we briefly explore each of the columns, highlighting practices and forms of organization that are usually ignored.

Figure 1 goes here

Transactions (B level heading)

In its singular, normal and lawful guise, "the market" is usually identified with capitalism, and as such is imbued with expansiveness, authority and force. Yet seen in the context of the plethora of transactions that make up our economic world (shown in Figure 1) it seems absurd to think that such a small part of the transactional whole, and one that is so aridly abstract in its theorization, has such power to colonize and obscure.[4]

Formal market exchange accounts for only one set of practices by which the goods and services that sustain livelihoods are transacted. Goods and services are also produced and *shared* in the household, nature provides abundant goods that are *taken* as well as stewarded, individuals and organizations *give away* goods and services, some people rightfully or illegally *steal* goods, goods and services are *allocated* by the state, and traded within and between communities according to traditions of *ritual exchange*.[5] What is clear is there is a huge variety and volume of these kinds of non-market transactions and that they are a significant (and possibly the dominant) form of transaction that sustains us all.

If we examine the formal market itself, we see a variety of socially, naturally and governmentally constructed contexts for commodity exchange. Markets are naturally and artificially protected, monopolized, regulated and niched and in all these cases transactions are governed by context specific contingent social relations rather than abstract and universal logics. Moreover, since markets are often conflated with

capitalism, it is important to recognize that not all commodities transacted in formal markets are produced by capitalist firms employing free wage labor—they may be produced by worker collectives, slaves, independent producers, or feudal serfs.

In addition, there are many "alternative" market transactions in which goods and services are exchanged and commensurability is socially negotiated and agreed upon: transactions that take place in the informal and underground markets in which goods and services are traded according to very local and personalized agreements; the exchange of commodities between and within producer cooperatives where prices are set to enhance sustainability of the cooperative; the ethical or "fair" trade of products where producers and consumers agree on price levels that will sustain certain livelihood practices; local trading systems and alternative currencies that foster local interdependency and sustainability; the marketing of goods and services produced by the state and "sold" under conditions where profit maximization is not the prime arbiter of viability. Barter is another prevalent form of transaction in which goods deemed to be equivalent in value by their producers or traders are exchanged without recourse to money.

Labor (B level heading)

The most prevalent form of labor the world over is the unpaid work that is conducted in the household, the family and the neighborhood or wider community, predominantly by women. Other forms of unpaid labor include the work of self-provisioning or subsistence (for example, gardening, gathering, hunting, fishing, making clothes). To include all of this work in a conception of a diverse economy is to re-present many people who see themselves (or are labeled) as "unemployed" or "not economically

active" as economic subjects, that is, as contributing to the vast skein of productive and transactional activities that sustain social existence.

The usual image of wage labor is of workers who sell their labor power to a capitalist employer in return for a monetary wage set at a level that allows them and their dependents to buy the commodities necessary for subsistence. There are, however, many other forms of labor that are "paid." Worker cooperatives employ a labor force (themselves) that is paid a living wage at a level decided upon by the cooperators. Self-employed workers are in the position of paying themselves a wage, setting (within the constraints of the success of their business) their own wage level and benefit entitlement.

Other people work in return for payments in kind (sometimes mixed with monetary payments). A share farmer works on someone else's land in return for a proportion of the harvest; a live-in migrant domestic servant works in someone's home in return for room and board and a small allowance of spending money that does not amount to a living wage. A pastor performs caring labor in a community and is supported by in kind payments—access to a house, car, gifts of food and a small stipend. Residents of a community offer their collective labor to others at times of high labor demand (harvest, house renovation or moving) in return for a reciprocal claim on labor at another time.

Forms of organization/enterprise (B level heading)

The diverse economy comprises many kinds of enterprise in which ownership and production are differently configured. We are concerned to highlight the ways in which enterprises organize the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus, that is, the

diversity of their class relations.[6] The notion of surplus rests upon an accounting distinction between the labor that is necessary for the producer's subsistence, and the labor that is surplus to the requirements of the direct producers and can be used to support other persons and activities.[7] This accounting distinction enables a view of a major source of social wealth (whether in the form of surplus labor, surplus product, or surplus value) and provides an analytical frame for highlighting the different ways this wealth is collected and dispersed.

Many producers have no control over what happens to their surplus—it is appropriated by non-producers who claim right to the wealth produced on a variety of grounds. In capitalist firms workers can be seen to have relinquished right to their surplus as part of the wage contract and it is appropriated by their capitalist employers (or board of directors of the capitalist firm). Similarly in feudal agricultural enterprises access to land for subsistence is granted on the condition that farmers perform surplus labor on their landlord's land or produce surplus product which is appropriated by the landlord. Slaves produce surplus labor that is appropriated by their owners or those who lease them from slaveholders. In all these cases the capitalists, landlords and slaveholders/leasers have first claim on distributing the appropriated surplus, which in the case of the modern capitalist firm goes to cover taxes, interest, dividends, advertising and management costs, investment in expansion (that is, capital accumulation), bribes, personal wealth enhancement, indeed any expenses in addition to those devoted to reproducing the production process (productive capital and labor power).

In addition to the exploitative form of class relations where non-producers appropriate surplus, there are non-exploitative enterprise forms in which workers

appropriate their own surplus. Independent, self-employed producers are in charge of producing, appropriating and distributing their own surplus and setting the distinction between their wage (the necessary labor payment) and their surplus. In worker cooperatives, cooperators set their own wage and produce a communal surplus that they collectively appropriate and distribute.

It should be remembered that not all capitalist firms are driven to distribute all of their surplus to expansion or the consumption fund of shareholders and managers. Difference *within* the category of capitalist enterprise is as important to recognize as the difference between organizational forms or class processes.[8] Increasingly there are 'alternative' capitalist firms who distinguish themselves from their mainstream capitalist counterparts in that part of their production process, their product, or their appropriated surplus is oriented toward environmentally friendly or socially responsible activity. State capitalist enterprises employ wage labor and appropriate their surplus but have the potential to produce public goods and distribute surplus funds to public benefit. Non-profit enterprises similarly employ wage labor and appropriate their surplus but by law are not allowed to retain or distribute profits.

By distinguishing all these different ways in which social wealth is generated and deployed, we are able to represent an "economy" as something more extensive and less concentrated than our usual, commonsense understanding of capitalism. Elaborating a vision of the "diverse economy" is one of our strategic moves against the subordination of local subjects to the discourse of (capitalist economic) globalization.[9] It prompts a recognition that "things could be otherwise" politically, based on the recognition that they are already "otherwise" discursively. What is visible, intelligible and measurable has

a different imaginative and social status than what is sequestered in the obscure realm of the unthought and unseen. If the elements of a diverse economy can be endowed with credible existence, they can become candidates for political projects of strengthening and building different economies here and now.

The intellectual project of widening the horizon of the economy and locating the diverse practices that occupy the economic landscape is one step towards re-politicizing the economy, exposing its singular capitalist identity as a regulatory fiction (Butler 1990). But what kind of economy might we put in place, if we were truly engaged in building alternatives that were not necessarily or predominantly capitalist? To begin to think about this is to embark upon another kind of language politics, one that involves what we have called the "community economy." But rather than the proliferative fullness we see in the diverse economy, the community economy is an emptiness—as it has to be, if the project of building it is to be political, experimental, open and democratic. We begin to explore the empty landscape of the community economy below.

Community Economies/Communal Subjects (A level heading)

What might it mean to build a community economy, if we refuse any positive blueprint that tells us what and where to build? Blueprints for economic development have to date been dominated by the naturalized universal of the capitalist economy (as the model of economy, as the only true, viable, self-regulating economy, as something that effaces its particularist origins in the West, in certain forms of market, in certain types of enterprise). Or alternatively they have attempted to prescribe socialism, understood as capitalism's opposite, with central planning and state ownership supplanting the

disavowed markets and privately-owned industrial property associated with socialism's capitalist "other."

Underpinning the complex set of strategies, policies and beliefs that constitute development discourse (whether it is aimed toward building capitalism or socialism) is a particular ontological framing of the economy that is rooted in the experience of Western European and North American industrialization. The relationships between production and consumption, investment and growth, proletarianization and material well-being, competition, technological change and efficiency that characterized these experiences have been reified as logics of economic functioning and placed outside of discourse onto the terrain of reality. Here they are worshipped as universal principles (sometimes represented as natural "laws") of economic evolution. Different attempts to produce economic development ignore these laws at their peril, it seems.

Our stance involves both resisting the attractions of any blueprint or vision of lawful development *and* proposing the *community economy* as a new and different kind of universal that might guide the process of building different economies. Unlike the structurally configured economy with its regularities and lawful relationships, the community economy is an acknowledged space of ethical interaction and self-formation. Anything but a blueprint, it is instead an empty and unknown terrain that calls forth exploratory conversation and ethical and political acts of decision.

For the minimalism and "emptiness" of the abstract community economy we are indebted to Jean-Luc Nancy (1991a, 74), who theorizes community starting from a pre-subjective recognition of the interdependent coexistence that is entailed in all "being"—something he calls "being-in-common" that constitutes "us all." Recognition of economic

being-in-common is a precondition for a politics aimed at building and extending community economic practices.[10] In approaching the task of signifying the community economy, however, we must keep in mind the ever-present danger that any attempt to fix a fantasy of common being (our sameness), to define the community economy, to specify what it contains (and thus what it does not) closes off the space of decision and the opportunity to cultivate ethical praxis. The space of decision as we have identified it is the emptiness at the center of the community economy; it constitutes the community economy as a *negativity* with potential to become rather than a *positivity* with clear contents and outlines. The practice of the community economy is a fluid process of continual resignification, rejecting any fantasy that there is a perfect community economy that lies outside of negotiation, struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence, disappointment, rejecting the notion that there's a blueprint that tells us what to do and how to "be communal." Indeed, it is a recognition that there's no way *not* to be communal, *not* to be materially implicated one with another, that recalls us to the political task of "building a community economy."

As with the discourse of economic difference, the practice of the community economy can be seen as already existing and widespread. It is interesting, for example, to note the many alternative economic movements that are explicitly about re-socializing economic relations and infusing them with ethical values and political intent. One has only to think of the fair trade networks that connect third world producers with first world consumers so that in the buying and selling of coffee or bananas or craft products the act of commensuration is *not* disembodied but is ethically negotiated in a quasi face-to-face manner (mirroring the once vital socialist trading blocs). Or the farmers' markets and

farm share arrangements and local buying campaigns of community supported agriculture that have sprung up in cities around the industrialized world to bring fresh produce to consumers at (higher) prices that allow farmers to stay in business. Here we see attempts to eliminate intermediaries and increase the proportion of surplus available to the producer. We can also look to employee buyouts of firms in the face of corporate abandonment in the US, and worker takeovers of factories in the face of economic crisis, as in Argentina today. Here workers are becoming owners, self-managers and appropriators of surplus, learning to make decisions about allocating the value they produce. We can look to the anti-sweatshop movement that raises awareness about rates of exploitation and below subsistence wage rates in industries producing commodities we all depend upon. Or to stockholder movements that use their financial clout to promote ethical investments and police the enforcement of corporate environmental and social responsibility. Or to the living wage movements in North American cities and newly invigorated discussions across Europe and the US of a Universal Basic Income (van Parijs 2001). Even mainstream economic policy has become interested in promoting social entrepreneurship in which non-profit enterprises provide social services at affordable rates and commit to employing community members who are excluded from capitalist labor markets (Amin et al. 2003). In all these movements economic decisions (about prices of goods, wage levels, bonus payments, re-investment strategies, sale of stock, etc.) are made in the light of ethical discussions conducted within various communities of "us all." In some cases these communities are geographically confined to the "local," in others they are international in scope and span the "global."

Movements that are re-socializing economic relations provide us with many opportunities to identify sites where ethical economic decisions can be made, where we can begin to perform economy in new ways. These movements involve the coming into being of novel economic subjects who can desire and enact alternative economic relationships. Their example recalls to us the centrality of the ethical economic subject to the politics of constructing a community economy. If our action research practice is concerned to actually build community economies in place, 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. In this connection 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 (see, for example, Horelli, this volume).

Women as subjects of economic development and activism (B level heading)

Alongside buoyant beliefs in the efficiency and benefits of globalization a haunting uncertainty has arisen surrounding the question of *who* the local agent of development in the age of globalization might be. Somewhat paradoxically we have recently seen heightened interest in the central role of women in development. While

nearly invisible within global and national scale debates about leveling the playing field and joining the global economy, at the local level women in poor urban and rural areas have become the targets of market-led approaches to economic development. Women have been recruited into micro-credit schemes and micro-enterprise development projects upon which the hopes for poverty reduction and economic growth are pinned. And in new debates that trace the success of development agendas to the "social capital" of certain communities, women's work in nurturing social ties and building and maintaining aspects of civil society is foregrounded as key.

The pioneering achievements of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh were one of the many factors encouraging international development agencies to shift their economic focus to women. Direct improvements to a poor community's livelihoods could be achieved, it seemed, by facilitating women's access to small amounts of credit that they could use to support home and community-based micro-enterprises. With the new micro-credit and micro-enterprise focus, neo-liberal market-led internationalist orthodoxies were married with longstanding local community traditions of revolving credit networks and women's involvement in informal sector production and trading. The ongoing success of these micro-finance schemes relies upon the self-regulating power of the women's borrower group to provide collective and corrective surveillance of individual women's economic habits (Rankin 2001). As more of these schemes have been monitored there is growing concern that some of their impacts may have undermined the trust and supportive networks (the social capital) that enabled them to be established in the first place.[11]

Clearly it is women's economic identity as existing or potential entrepreneurs that is called forth by these policies. And, as Rankin (2001) argues, it is to women as rational economic subjects, for whom individual gain is paramount, that the appeal for involvement in the schemes is made. Both these aspects of identity are linked to a vision of the economy as essentially capitalist, and the feminine subject as desirous of becoming a capitalist entrepreneur. This is a vision that denies the diversity of women's economic commitments and involvements and ignores the multiplicity of economies and subjects that coexist in economically distinctive places. Importantly, it is a view that disregards the many different opportunities and directions for local economic transformation.

Viewing the recent gender-focused interventions by international development agencies within a diverse economy frame, we can see that these schemes seek to strengthen or establish women as self-employed workers in small enterprises that are modeled upon capitalist enterprise. The "development dream" is that, through good fiscal management and innovative product development, some of these micro-enterprises will become fully-fledged capitalist enterprises and the economic benefits will then flow to the wider society.

At the base of the development dream is faith in the incredible productive capacity of capitalist enterprise to generate wealth that can then "float all boats," supporting higher standards of living and increased levels of well-being. What is rarely a part of this dream, however, is the mechanism by which these benefits will be distributed (let alone redistributed) to all *beyond* those who actively participate in the capital investment or labor markets. The "us all" that constitutes the majority of society not directly participating in these markets (where some "return" can be expected) is left out

of the picture. The ethical dimensions of surplus generation, its distribution and role in building society are not up for discussion in mainstream development discourse, despite ample evidence that the disparities wrought by capitalist development are not disappearing either within many national economies or on a global scale.

In contrast, the project of building and strengthening community economies assumes that the production and distribution of economic benefit cannot be left to chance. It involves a vision of the economy as an ethical space of negotiated interdependence rather than a self-regulating structure automatically producing (via the invisible hand) increased social well-being through the unbridled pursuit of self-interest. In an environment where the development apparatus is explicitly engaged in producing the entrepreneurial subjects of a capitalist order, it is necessary to pursue an alternative "politics of the subject," cultivating "interests" in community economies and capacities to construct them. Not surprisingly it is primarily in the process of building economic alternatives that alternative subjects and capacities emerge.[12]

Women Building Community Economies in Place (A level heading)

Below we examine two projects in which women are taking decisions to build new kinds of economy—economies in which social interdependence (economic being-in-common) is acknowledged and fostered and new kinds of community are produced. Each story attests to the power of place as a site of economic diversity and potential, rather than a colonized node in a capitalist world. Each shows women as activists building and strengthening their community economies. And each highlights the constitution of communal subjects through the project of building a community economy in place.

Filipina migrants building the community economy (B level heading)

The international migration of Filipino workers for employment is a central economic strategy for the government of the Philippines, where migrant remittances currently constitute the major source of foreign exchange, exceeding direct foreign investment. Officially reported remittances amounted to more than $US 7 billion per year for the past 3 years and are projected to reach more than $8 billion in 2004 (Mellyn 2003, Domingo 2004).[13] Since this amount exceeds foreign aid for development, the Philippines government, like the governments of other migrant-sending nations, is beginning to consider the development potential of migrant remittances.

Migration is also an important individual and family strategy, with younger workers (the majority of whom are women) leaving home to seek work, primarily in domestic service or merchant seafaring jobs. Conservative estimates place the current number of Filipino overseas migrants at 7.5 million, roughly 10 percent of the population. If the remittances of each of those migrants reach on average 5 people, then well over half of the 76 million Filipinos are directly affected by flows of migration and migrant money.

At the turn of the 21st century, there were almost 150, 000 Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong alone (Villalba 2001). The bulk of these women's remittances go to their families to expand their consumption and raise their standards of living. But some of them have begun to question the exclusive use of their savings for family consumption, recognizing that such use condemns them (and eventually others) to

continued migration for employment. Although supporting their families is important to them, many also want something additional from the migration experience:

> …we wanted to be recognized in our home town, to make a difference in our place and to make something of ourselves. Some of us even thought of bringing change in our community. (Filipina migrant, quoted in Villalba 2001, 81)

An opportunity to "bring change to the community" is currently being provided by an innovative NGO called the Asian Migrant Centre (AMC). Rather than pursuing the usual NGO strategy of providing services to migrants, the AMC has instead taken up the project of fostering economic activism among them. This has involved a two-pronged initiative: 1) supporting the unionization of domestic workers and mobilizing their political activity around issues in the host country involving wages, benefits, working conditions and immigration policy, and at the same time 2) fostering savings groups to marshall funds for investment to create businesses in the women's home communities. From the perspective of the AMC, migration is a temporary experience that can be instrumental in transforming not only family and individual futures but in creating sustainable economies in women's localities of origin (Gibson et al. 2001).

Savings groups are made up of 5 to 20 women who are usually able to save about 5 percent of their wages (approximately HK$200 per month) (Gibson et al. 2001). They work with NGOs based in the Philippines to develop investment and business plans, often involving local community and family members in various capacities. One of the

organizations pioneering community enterprise development in collaboration with the AMC is Unlad Kabayan, an NGO that is currently fostering projects in eight provinces of the Philippines. With the assistance of Unlad migrant savings groups are investing in organic chicken farms, rice milling, ube (aromatic yam) processing and confectionery making, a general store, and a coconut coir manufacturing plant, among other businesses. The hope is that such enterprises will reduce and eventually replace the need for continued cyclical out-migration.

We are engaged in a collaborative action research project with Unlad, the local government and members of the community to develop a number of enterprises in the coastal town of Jagna on the island of Bohol. Potential projects involve a group of porters at the local port who are researching the feasibility of a trucking business that could connect upland farmers with urban markets; women who have received sewing training and are investigating the possibility of producing and hiring out ceremonial robes such as togas for school graduations, or wedding and bridesmaids dresses; and various primary producers who are interested in value-added production of locally-identified products such as virgin coconut oil for the local and export markets.[14] The project participants (including migrant investors, the research team and NGO staff, and local collective entrepreneurs) are committed to establishing businesses that accord with values other than profit maximization and to cultivating subjects other than the self-interested individual—investors, workers, and managers who are capable and desirous of constructing a community economy in place. What that involves is continually negotiating the goals and relationships of each enterprise, taking into account their

impacts on social well-being and ecological sustainability, and their potential for increasing the surplus available for building the community economy.

To understand the current and potential success of the AMC, Unlad and the women migrants, it is important to recognize the micro-politics of self-formation that accompanies the women's involvement in savings groups for alternative investment. Women migrants who participate in savings groups are making the decision not to consume their wages in Hong Kong and thus are drawing a boundary between their necessary and surplus labor, taking the decision to reduce consumption in order to constitute a surplus available for other things. They are also deciding not to distribute all of their surplus to their families' consumption fund but instead to reserve a portion for community-oriented investment.[15] Through the lens of class analysis we can see that these women are constituting a new class position for themselves as independent appropriators and distributors of their own surplus. While they may inhabit simultaneously the class position of exploited and indentured laborer (a portion of) whose surplus is appropriated by their employer, their new independent class position is nonetheless empowering. Moreover, the distribution to community enterprise projects adds a communal class identification to their independent and indentured ones (Gibson et al. 2001, Gibson-Graham 2004a). Thus, they are redefining themselves not only as self-appropriating (of their surplus) but as ethical subjects of a community economy.

Women building the community economy in Mararikulam (B level heading)

Mararikulam is one of the poorest areas of the coastal Indian province of Kerala. Yet in this district literacy rates are above 90 percent, infant mortality is low and life

expectancy greater than 70 years—indicators that that are close to what we would expect in a wealthy country (Franke 2003, 8). Currently Kerala is engaged in what they call the "Mararikulam experiment"—an adventure in generating local income and employment for the poorest of the poor, inspired by the Mondragon experience in the Basque region of Spain. At the heart of Mondragon's success in generating local employment and increasing standards of living is a strong base of worker-owned industrial cooperatives in which the workers appropriate the surplus they produce (rather than it going to the capitalist, or to the board of directors of a capitalist firm). The cooperatively produced commodities are marketed locally, nationally and internationally. And the industrial coops are supported by "second degree" cooperative organizations that function to redistribute a proportion of the surplus generated toward creating more coops, including not only more industrial coops but also coops providing education (from pre-school through university), housing, health care and social security (Gibson-Graham 2003a).

Mondragon provides an inspirational model of a community economy built around the generation, marshalling and distribution of surplus. But any examination of the Mondragon experiment must be struck by the contingent conditions prevailing in the Basque region that presented those cooperators with their particular challenges. This place-based model cannot be transported to any site in the world and expected to work without modification. In each site the particular and contingent conditions will present their own challenges, shaping the decisions made and pathways followed. The insight that surplus *is* generated and that wealth *can be* shared equitably and democratically is what Mondragon teaches us.

The Mararikulam experiment is not only following and adapting the Mondragon model but building on decades of struggles for social justice in Kerala and most recently the province wide 1996-2001 Kerala People's Plan Campaign that lifted literacy levels and engaged people in planning processes through innovative grass roots initiatives carried out in each village (Thomas Isaac et al. 1998). In the spirit of self-reliance associated with Mahatma Gandhi and as part of this experiment, over 1,500 neighborhood savings groups made up of 20 to 40 women are transforming themselves from credit associations to production cooperatives. The exclusive emphasis on women's involvement is a way of addressing issues of gender equity and women's empowerment in Kerala, developing women's productive power to enhance their social and political power. The first step has been to generate capital by organizing women to redefine some of their meager earnings as a surplus to be saved and invested, rather than as a part of the necessary consumption fund. Even very small amounts, when saved by 17,000 women, have yielded enough to capitalize a number of small cooperatives (Franke 2003, 9).

This is where the Mararikulam experiment is both building on and going beyond the development approach of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which has demonstrated the benefit that savings and small scale loans can have on women's livelihoods. In Mararikulam the lending structure is organized and controlled by elected committees of the women's neighborhood groups, not an outside bank bureaucracy. Members of the savings group are linked not just via the social monitoring of saving and loan repayment, but also as potential worker-owners in a collective income-generating enterprise. The usual projects that target savings and micro-credit involve women working alone in self-employed micro-enterprises and the level of marketing, technological and quality control

support is minimal, thus increasing the vulnerability of the exercise and diminishing its chances of growing beyond a certain small size. Rankin (2001) has also pointed out the dangers of programs that rely on collective disciplining of individual repayment behavior resulting in an undermining of other aspects of the community economy such as traditional sharing practices. In the Mararikulam case the emphasis on micro-cooperative enterprises attempts to address the individualization of these initiatives. Moreover, the small coops are supported by a centralized marketing and capital management corporation that provides services to all the micro-enterprises across the larger community.[16] Purchasing these services involves a distribution of surplus generated in the small-scale enterprises, but it is a distribution that ensures the likelihood of success of the micro-cooperative and the sustainable generation of an income for the poor women involved.

The goal of the Mararikulam experiment is to generate up to 20,000 jobs "paying enough to bring households above the poverty line" (Franke 2003, 8) by creating a big federation of small coops. The initial coops started by producing soap, an ideal product not only because it can be made using coconut oil, an abundant local product, but because Kerala consumes more soap per capita than the rest of India. At a meeting held in 2002, 30,000 women took the Mari soap pledge, to buy Mari soap rather than imported brands in a conscious act of resistance to corporate globalization as well as an affirmation of local self-reliance.

By 2003 the second stage was underway, with coops producing semi-processed foods, umbrellas, school notebooks, school bags and kits. The third more ambitious stage will develop Mararikulam's food producing potential, including fish farming and

processing the ocean catch of fish, shrimp and mussels. It will also develop more technologically advanced employment in the manufacture of coir (coconut fiber) products like geo-textiles and packaging. Here they will become exporters, producing food and manufactured products beyond the local capacity for consumption.

The basic idea of the Mararikulam experiment is that local "wealth" can be collectively marshalled to bring people out of poverty. Local governments and the worker-owners themselves supply more than 40 percent of the investment funds for this experiment with additional funding coming at this stage from provincial and international agencies. And rather than relying on the promise of a trickle down of benefit from the development of capitalist enterprise, the women of Mararikulam are taking matters into their own hands, deciding to use their own savings to leverage funds from community based organizations to build self-reliant worker cooperatives in which they are the first receivers and distributors of their own surplus. Through constructing the capacity to generate surplus in cooperative enterprises that are collectively supported by community wide organizations,[17] the women of Mararikulam are maximizing the chance that benefits will be widely shared and constituting themselves as communal economic subjects in the process.

A Concluding Thought (A level heading)

What is encouraging and inspiring to us about these stories of women who are building community economies in place is not just the evidence of local success, though this is indeed remarkable and hopeful. Much more broadly, however, we believe that we are witnessing the emergence of a new economic politics—one that is place-based yet

globally distributed, in localities and regions on every (populated) continent (Gibson-Graham 2004b, Osterweil 2004). A number of factors have conspired to delay the widespread recognition of this emergent politics, not least of which is the tendency to privilege the global as important and transformative while denigrating the local as contained and coopted—especially where economic politics is concerned. Another factor of course is the global/local binary itself, which makes it difficult to perceive the two poles coexisting in one political form. And yet this is indeed is what seems to be happening—a *global*ly emergent politics of *local* economic construction, based on widely shared values of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and community. We can recognize this politics in the "movement of movements" and the World Social Forum, in the popular fascination with the experience of the Zapatistas and the Argentine unemployed workers' movement, in the explosion of books, articles, videos and websites covering these movements as well local economic projects that are less well-known. Something is happening, it seems, simultaneously on the local and global scales.

At the beginning of the chapter, we spoke of the way that second wave feminism has shaped and motivated our place-based economic politics. Feminism became a global movement not because it was globally organized but because women are everywhere. And of course not only are women everywhere but so are economic practices, relationships, and organizations. What this suggests to us is the globally transformative potential of place-based initiatives, as economies are (re)constructed locally and participants are linked across distance through mutual learning, ties of cooperation, and local identifications with a global "movement." It is this new global politics that Women

and the Politics of Place is helping to bring to (self)recognition, and that offers the possibility of far-reaching change.[18] We are excited to be living in these terrible times.

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Figure 1 A Diverse Economy[1]

Transactions	*Labor*	*Enterprise*
MARKET	**WAGE**	**CAPITALIST**
ALTERNATIVE MARKET ***Sale of public goods*** ***Ethical 'fair-trade' markets*** ***Local trading systems*** ***Alternative currencies*** ***Underground market*** ***Co-op exchange*** ***Barter*** ***Informal market***	***ALTERNATIVE PAID*** ***Self-employed*** ***Cooperative*** ***Indentured*** ***Reciprocal labor*** ***In kind*** ***Work for welfare***	***ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST*** ***State enterprise*** ***Green capitalist*** ***Socially responsible firm*** ***Non-profit***
NON-MARKET ***Household flows*** ***Gift giving*** ***Indigenous exchange*** ***State allocations*** ***Gleaning*** ***Hunting, fishing, gathering*** ***Theft, poaching***	***UNPAID*** ***Housework*** ***Family care*** ***Neighborhood work*** ***Volunteer*** ***Self-provisioning labor*** ***Slave labor*** ***Surplus labor***	***NON-CAPITALIST*** ***Communal*** ***Independent*** ***Feudal*** ***Slave***

[1] The table is organized as columns and is not intended to be read across the rows. Note, for instance, that non-capitalist enterprises (bottom row) are engaged in market transactions (top row).

[1] Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003) provide a review of this literature.

[2] From a capitalocentric perspective these activities are often seen as remnant social or cultural practices rather than (an arguably growing) part of contemporary economies.

[3] Clearly more dimensions of difference could be added, for example, property and resource ownership.

[4] Indeed North comments that "It is a peculiar fact that the literature on economics…contains so little discussion of the central institution that underlies neo-classical economics—the market" (North 1977, quoted in Callon 1998,1).

[5] While the vast extent of the literature on gift giving and ritual exchange has focused on these practices in "traditional" societies (see, for example, Gudeman 2000 for an overview), recent research in "the west" has highlighted the huge significance of gift giving, sharing and obligatory allocations between extended kin networks and other networks (church groups, locality based communities etc) (Community Economies Collective 2001, Godbout 1998).

[6] Attempts to recoup and develop Marx's economic analysis of surplus production, appropriation and distribution have rekindled an interest in an anti-essentialist economic language of class (as opposed to a language of social distinction) (Resnick and Wolff 1987, Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff 2000, 2001). This language is non-systemic and offers the possibility of theorizing the complex coexistence of multiple class processes in the constitution of contemporary societies and subjects. It is also nonlinear in that it is released from a teleology of economic development, where feudalism gives way to capitalism, capitalism to socialism (or to the end of history). In other words, it

allows a reinstatement of history and contingency in the domain of economy. It de-naturalizes dominance, making capitalist dominance an historical and theoretical question rather than a natural feature of capitalism. We are interested in developing and bringing this class language to a position of more prominence in an alternative (counter-hegemonic) discourse of economic difference.

[7] Hindess and Hirst (1975) clarify this point when they state: "[s]urplus labour…exists in all modes of production because the conditions of reproduction of the labourer are not equivalent to the conditions of reproduction of the economy" (26).

[8] A failure to be attentive to this difference blinds us to the potential for there to be 'good' capitalist firms/employers and encourages myopia when viewing the down side of communality or socialism.

[9] For the most part, economic diversity has been framed in the familiar terms of market vs. state (this is what gives us the Third Way and the Social Economy), or in the evaluative hierarchies of traditional and modern, backward or developed that permeate and perpetuate the project of capitalist development.

[10] Such a politics of course always confronts the dangers of posing a positivity, a normative representation of the community economy, in which certain ethics and practices are valued over others. For instance, the language of the diverse economy recognizes the contemporary prevalence of slavery as a mode of economic organization, indentured labor as a form of remunerated labor, and theft as a mode of transaction. All are sites in which the sociality and interdependency of economic relations is not hidden but is violently and coercively present. It is difficult to imagine the place of these practices in a discourse of community economy that can counter the hegemonic hold of

capitalism on the ideas of freedom and democracy. And yet theft is often the only resort of the poor for economic survival, and when it involves reclaiming what has been unlawfully taken, as in common land, resources or intellectual property, it may be construed as a legitimate mode of economic redistribution. Likewise indentured labor performed in one national economy might generate savings that can be used to start community enterprises in another. On what basis might we exclude or include such activities in the practice of building community economies?

[11] "Ethnographic studies have shown that in some microcredit programmes group members vigorously monitor one another's consumption patterns to ensure cash reserves are devoted foremost to loan repayment. In practice, the groups can thus generate an environment of hostility and coercion that polarizes, rather than unites, their members" (Rankin 2001, 32).

[12] When unemployed workers in Argentina took over abandoned factories after the economic crisis of 2001, the obstacle they encountered was not the state or capital—which were after all in disarray—but their own subjectivities. They were workers, not managers or sales reps or entrepreneurs, and as one of them said, "If they had come to us with 50 pesos and told us to show up for work tomorrow, we would have done just that." Instead, for lack of an option, they found themselves recreating Argentine manufacturing. Just as they had formerly constituted a capitalist economy through their identifications and daily practices as workers, so they are now constituting an economy and sociality of "solidarity" as members of the unemployed workers' movement (MTD). That this requires "a struggle against themselves" is one of their principal tenets and observances (Chatterton 2005, 26, quoting Colectivo Situaciones). For the MTD, combating

capitalism means refusing a longstanding sense of self and mode of being in the world, while simultaneously cultivating new forms of sociability, visions of happiness, and economic capacities (Colectivo Situaciones 2004, 13). It is as though they had taken up the challenge of economic subjectivity that Foucault identified many years earlier, and made it the touchstone of their movement:

> The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the economy…but to liberate us both from the economy and from the type of individualization that is linked to the economy. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (Foucault 1982, 216)

[13] Mellyn (2003) estimates that this amount would be doubled if unregulated remittances were taken into account.

[14] This is a project Katherine Gibson is involved in with ANU colleagues Deirdre McKay, Kathryn Robinson and Andrew McWilliam, and doctoral students Amanda Cahill and Jayne Curnow (Australian Research Council Grant No. LP0347118 "Negotiating alternative economic strategies for regional development in Indonesia and the Philippines").

[15] This transformation often involves internal conflict and conflict with the agendas of family members:

> Because I am the youngest [in the family] I only supported my father and mother. …I told them before I come here in Hong Kong [from working in Singapore]. "I only have to send you 1,500 pesos every month." Because I

> said "I want to save my income." So I [am] not planning on staying in Hong Kong for long, for many years. So I want to come back home in a few years. (Gibson et al. 2001)

[16] The marketing firm works on establishing brand loyalty (for example, the Mari soap pledge) but will also "arrange economies of scale where practicable, will oversee product quality to facilitate out-of-region markets, will assure consistent health and safety standard in all the local units" (Mararikulam Experiment Project website, page 2).

[17] Indeed, the construction of local health care clinics is part of the accompanying project of improving public health, health care and nutrition.

[18] This does not mean that other types of politics are no longer necessary or appropriate, or that women in place do not have to negotiate the realities of global power. Rather it is an acknowledgment that there is more than one political way forward, and an attempt to discern the outlines of an emerging political imaginary (Gibson-Graham 2004, Osterweil 2004). For a longer discussion of the politics of place as it relates to the politics of empire, see Gibson-Graham (2003b).