

Sociology 929. The Social Economy
Reading Interrogations, Session 6, 10/6/2010
Community Economics

[EOW comments in red]

1. João Alexandre Peschanski

Postcapitalist Politics aims to present strategies to sustain alternative forms of organizing the economy, that lead to a beyond-capitalism political imaginary. Gibson-Graham emphasize strategies that generate and reproduce ethical practices and community-building. As they say: “If politics is a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions in an undecidable terrain, ethics is the continual exercising, in the face of the need to decide, of a choice to be/act/think a certain way,” where that certain way relates to “the co-implicated processes of changing the self/thinking/world” (xxviii). Postcapitalist politics, in that sense, claims for an ontological reframing of one’s acting within the world, that involves the building of a new politics of language, of the subject and of collective action.

Gibson-Graham look at the building of community economies as means of development. In order to sustain alternative economic systems, communities pursue alternative routes to development by: (1) choosing to meet local *needs*; (2) distributing *surplus* based on community needs; (3) understanding *consumption* as a driver of development; and (4) the enlarging of *commons* (193). I present some questions about those routes to development.

On (1): Steve raised an interesting critique two weeks ago: our production system is very complex, and we cannot come back to local production as an alternative to highly productive industrial models of production. *Can we think of a large-scale community economy to supplant complex systems of production? Do community economies need to coexist with other forms of organizing production if they are to become a real alternative? How is that coexistence to be negotiated?* **I think G-G would argue that we cannot possibly know in advance how large the space for community-economics might be, how autonomous it could be from the capitalist-market economy, and how the terms of its interaction can be forged. The limits of possibility for that articulation are not given but constructed. So, if large numbers of people are willing to have much more modest consumption standards, which they can choose, then the amount of collective labor needed to engage in exchanges with the capitalist economy for whatever inputs are needed from that domain might be quite small in the aggregate. I think this is how they would frame the issue.**

On (2): community economies within a given territory (a country) might reach different levels of success. *How is the transfer of surplus from successful economies to less successful economies to be negotiated, so that the principle of social distribution is respected?* Mondragón is an example of that kind of transfer -- successful companies pay for less successful, as an intervention to make them succeed --, but Mondragón rests upon institutional arrangements that ground that form of intervention. In the discussion about a systemic alternative to capitalism, one needs to have in mind that those institutional arrangements need to take into account many complex features: decision-making with millions of people, transfer of information, complex rules of allocation and transfer of resources. *How are community economies to solve those*

complexity requirements? What is the role of the state in the beyond-capitalism transition? (The state is the big absentee from Gibson-Graham's theory.) **There may be two distinct issues in play here: the mechanisms of transfers and redistributions within a community economy, and the mechanisms that involve the interactions with capitalist economy. The state may be central to the latter but not the former.**

On (3): *what is the dynamic for stimulating innovation in a system that prioritizes consumption over investment return? Capitalists generally claim that competition stimulates innovation, but from an ethical perspective that innovation does not intend to meet people's needs but profit maximization. How do we stimulate innovation that meets people's needs?* **A great deal of innovation even in capitalism is generated by motives other than profit-maximization and competition – think of all the research in universities, for example. I think the consumption-centered focus should be read not so much as consumption vs production or investment, but rather in terms of the centrality of needs in driving decisions. The need for more leisure time could be a driver of technical innovation to increase efficiency within production, for example. Your question is still relevant about the incentives required for a steady flow of such innovation. I am not sure about this, but my hypothesis would be that the pivotal issue here is the problem of risk-taking rather than simply the motivation for innovation. The problem is that innovations require resources and time and effort and that most attempts will not generate successful innovation, so risk is important.**

On (4): *what are the mechanisms that prevent the game-theory problem called “tragedy of the commons?” What is to prevent people's rational incentive to deviate from cooperation to develop noncooperative attitudes?* In the “tragedy of the commons,” the deviation is generally understood as an individual deviation against the rest of the community; in the case of a society organized by communities, one could imagine the deviation of one community against all the other communities, like the payoff matrix below.

		Your community	
		Cooperation	No cooperation
All other communities	Cooperation	2	1
	No cooperation	4	3

Preference-ordering: NC/C > C/C > NC/NC > C/NC

Outcome: NC/NC

The behavioral economics research on collective action problems clearly shows that as a general matter people do not universally act as rational egoist maximizers in these contexts, and in any case there are many “solutions” to the PD that emerge in practical contexts. There is no particular reason to believe that this will be a less tractable issue in a less competitive, less capitalistically driven economic structure. I think the underlying theoretical argument in the G-G view is that capitalist-competitive economic environment induce the most predatory forms of rationality; the more the communitarian/community

forms of economic practices flourish, the more the cooperative dispositions will have space to operate, and thus the easier it will be to solve commons problems.

Gibson-Graham present action-research projects as a distinct form of studying postcapitalist politics. They define those projects as a means for them “to *speak* and *hear* richer, more vibrant economic difference, to construct alternative economic representations, to cultivate subjects for a community economy, and ultimately perhaps to build a linguistic and practical community around new economic projects and possibilities” (131). The building of a beyond-capitalism society requires a new way of doing science, so they claim. Other authors that look for alternatives -- i.e. Wright and Burawoy -- also defend new ways of doing science for transformation -- emancipatory social science and public sociology, respectively. *Why do we need a new form of doing science to study alternatives? What are the differences between the scientific proposals of Gibson-Graham, Wright and Burawoy?* **I do not really argue for a new way of doing science. My call for an emancipatory social science is a call for distinctive questions and agendas, but not really for a specific method, epistemology or ontology. I adopt a fairly standard version of scientific realism as the philosophical foundation for exploring alternatives. Of course, the grounding for the questions one asks is a pretty big deal – this does define a good deal about what one studies and how one goes about it, but it doesn’t define a new form of doing science.**

2. Nina Baron

I found J. K. Gibson-Grahams book very interesting. Their thoughts about how we take the capitalism way of thinking about development for granted and their discussions on how we can think about development in new ways, I find especially useful. To look at a community with focus on its strengths and not weaknesses is an approach there is not often used. Both governments that work with local community development and organisations working with international aid normally starts out focusing on problems.

Gibson-Graham point out the need to “start where you are” when you want to change the economy towards a more community orientated approach. With this they mean two things. To start with what you have, and to start from where you are in the social system. The final point in the book is that we as academics as well as others can be a part of this work for making the community economic grow. It is this I would like to discuss with you.

Gibson-Graham try to deconstruct the way we understand and think about the economy. They want to show that there exists many other types of economy than capitalism. Is it in this deconstruction process that we as academics can contribute with something? And can we work for that this process not stays in the academic world, but also gets out and change something about how people outside academia think about the economy and there possibilities for changing there own world? **The premise here in G-Gs work is that a major obstacle to changing the world is how people think about the world, especially what they regard as natural and essential and what they regard as variable and contingent. Sometimes they come close to arguing that the *only* serious obstacle to transformation is belief, but then they turn around**

and affirm the salience of “materiality” and not just discourse. In any case, if cognitive categories are a major obstacle, then there is decisive work for academics to do.

How can our works, the academic work in general and specific in this class, help building community economies? Can we contribute to that ex. organisations there works with international aid, begin to open up for other ways to look at development?

To summarise: what are our possibilities and obligations when we as scholars study the social economy or the community economy?

3. Nate Ela

I found the chapters that we read for this week both satisfying and frustrating. Satisfying, because I sympathized with the chapter on deconstruction of “capitalocentrism”; frustrating, because I didn’t find the other three chapters to provide a sufficient reconstruction of a positive social or economic model. My question is whether it would be possible to combine the insights of Gibson Graham’s deconstruction with those of selections that we have read that have attempted to sketch a more coherent structure of the social or solidarity economy. **In a way their approach to the positive task is what could be called the multi-dimensional menu strategy: think of all of the possible noncapitalist forms, figure out some large classification-dimensions in which to organize this list, but do not try to put the pieces together. They acknowledge straight out that this is unsystematic – and they even regard this as a virtue, since a phony systematicity would itself constrain thinking about alternatives.**

In certain ways, I found Gibson Graham’s chapter on deconstruction more helpful and more honest than other readings we have had on the social economy. I largely agreed with the mapping of diverse, non-capitalistic economic practices, and found the argument for already-existing economic diversity more helpful and convincing than other authors’ arguments for already-existing social economy structures. I also appreciated the honest and explicit recognition that the authors were embarking on a linguistic and discursive project; other authors who have sought to demonstrate the existence of a social economy seem to embark on a similar project, but without explicitly acknowledging it.

I was less convinced, however, by Gibson Graham’s effort to create a positive framework for thinking and talking about the community economy. Although I agree that needs, surplus, consumption, and the commons are important aspects to consider in any social/community economy practice/institution, I found myself yearning (despite my previous hesitations) for some more coherent – maybe even triangular – model to help describe possible institutional designs and practices of non-capitalist economies.

My questions: how might the deconstructive mapping of economic diversity, with its rich treatment of diverse types of transactions, labor and enterprise, help enrich the structural models that other authors (such as Wright or Evers and Laville) have presented for the social economy? Or should we accept Gibson Graham’s argument that alternative economies are “unable to be modeled into an emergent whole”, and let ourselves be satisfied with their vision of a diverse

economy as “an open system that is patchy, only partially coherent, heterogeneous, continuous, limitless”? Is one conceptual strategy preferable to the other? **I personally think that both strategies are needed and that there is no particular reason to favor one approach over another as a general matter. In part this is a question of the intellectual strengths of different people engaged in creative imagining on these themes: some people are good at constructing coherent systems of elements, others at observing and distilling menus of alternatives. I think both are needed. Let a thousand flowers bloom!**

4. Emanuel Ubert

Gibson-Graham argue that the challenge of hegemonic, capitalocentric discourse is a necessary prerequisite to re-politicize the economy, and to establish a “weak theory” of economic dynamics that consciously embraces heterogeneity in economic development paths. They then proceed to use the “community economy” as one example of an alternative economic discourse that is not restricted to capitalists concepts, and that re-signifies the economy as a site of decision and economic practices as inherently social. They propose four coordinates (necessity, surplus, etc.) whose interaction could inform an ethics and politics of the community economy, but explicitly stress the danger of defining the community economy and thereby closing off opportunities for the cultivation of “ethical praxis”. The practice of building such a community economy is to be a process of “continual re-signification, or repeated traversals of any fantasy that there is a perfect community economy that lies outside of negotiation, struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence, disappointment, one that tells us what to do and how to be communal” (p.98/99).

While I appreciate the importance of conceiving the economy as “contingent space of recognition and negotiation” in opening up “the ethical practice of economic contingency”, I am skeptical about the practical effectiveness of such discourses in competing with and dislodging the “condensation and replacement” strategy of the hegemonic capitalist discourse.

Does the refusal of specifying an ideal alternative, as inaccurate as it may be, not pose a serious, strategic disadvantage in dislodging the current hegemonic capitalist discourse and practice?

One could argue that the refusal to posit an ideal alternative system is precisely what is needed to open up a space for ideal alternative practices that build alternative spaces for ethical economic activity. The alternative system approach can contribute to marginalizing such space-building struggles because of the implausibility in any given context of such struggle actually generating the alternative system. I think this is how they think about the issue.

Fox News is the country's most popular news channel and Bill O'Reilly's book “Pinheads and Patriots: Where You Stand in the Age of Obama” is currently #42 on Amazon's bestselling list (#6 in Non-Fiction/ Social Sciences/ Political Sciences). On the other hand, the only reason I am learning about the inspiring, yet highly contextual example of a replenishing of the commons by indigenous people of the Sierra Madre del Sur hinterland (p.191), is because I am reading “Postcapitalist Politics” (# 71,188 on Amazon's bestselling list) in a graduate sociology seminar, and because I am not part of the working/ corporate class that simply has no time to engage in such explorations of alternatives.

It thus seems to me that the power of the hegemonic discourse stems precisely from its abstracted and condensed nature, and a discourse based on the alternative multi-dimensionality of “being-in-common” is simply too complex to pose a serious threat to the status-quo (i.e. it won't be able to offer a compelling counter-narrative to serve as inspiration...).

5. Matthew Kearney

Striving to move towards "a new hegemonic articulation" (81), Gibson-Graham embed an empirical discussion (mostly chapters 5 and 7) in a theoretical discussion (mostly chapters 3 and 4). They have many insights into the diversity economy, but what is their goal? From what vision of emancipation from capitalism and capitalocentrism are they working? Are they implementing Wright's program of starting with a vision, or are they missing this critical orientation? One indication that they might be missing it is that their case studies do not necessarily all move in the same direction. Consider, for instance, the community gardens of Nuestras Raices vs. the windfall capital fund of Kiribati.

To ask what I think is the same question in a different way, are Gibson-Graham trying to return us to the noble savagesque ideal of local communal ownership and decision-making, reclaiming and enlarging the Commons? If so, to what end? Or, alternatively, are they proposing a new vision for economic action that has not yet been realized, even in the distant past? I am not trying to criticize either option, or to indicate a preference on my part for one over the other. A third option, of course, is that they are not doing either of these, but operating without a long-term vision. **I think there is a strong moral vision in play here – a vision about human flourishing and eliminating oppression of various forms. The backwards looking forms of communalism are not, in their framework a “return” to something in the past, since there is no temporality in their menu of practices. It is just a menu in which everything is both context-specific and contingent and relevant for universal menu of alternatives.**

6. Ayca Zayim

Firstly, in Gibson-Graham's work, I find “being-in-common” –in contrast to “being” and “being together”- as a useful framework to construct the “community economy”. This perspective, interestingly, brings us back to the criticisms put forward by Kathleen and others against the Alternative Agrifood Movement and its emphasis on the ‘local’. As proposed by Gibson-Graham, community economy highlights negotiations between different economic actors and new opportunities of economic life, and as such, it is posited as an attack on the dominant “capitalocentric” discourse. Yet, in their efforts in ‘resocializing’ the economy, I believe Gibson-Graham seem to overlook that even the part of the economy that is capitalistic is not capitalistic in the way depicted by the capitalocentric discourse. For example, markets, even capitalist ones, are never perfectly ‘free’ and calculations are never based on a pure cost-benefit framework. **I think they kind of recognize this. They also put “free” in quotation marks in their figure 13 on transactions.**

Secondly, Gibson-Graham underline “appreciating economic diversity” as a way to challenge the dominant discourse. Indeed, this might be one of the important tools that help to undermine it.

Yet, this discourse is embedded in the **structural** inequalities of capitalism that need to be first addressed. In their account, the dominant discourse on development is discussed at the discursive level with its actors and the power configurations they are embedded in are mostly unmentioned. In that sense, I am curious to what extent this can be a 'successful' strategy in attacking the dominance of the dominant strategy? –In a way, this question relates to their approach and method.- **G-G come very close to denying that there really is anything that is truly “structural”. They acknowledge that patterns of interaction can become fairly sedimented and secure in ways that appear structural, but they are resolutely “post-structuralist” in insisting that this is always-and-everywhere contingent, rather than “fixed” or “essential”. I frankly don't really understand what they are talking about.**

Thirdly, Gibson-Graham present the case of Mondragon as a material example of community economy and applaud its success “not only in the light of political and economic circumstances, but in the face of the obstacles by economic and political thought about the viability and sustainability of cooperatives” (pp.105-6). They emphasize experimentation and treating obstacles as resources. While this might be important, does not this approach –responding to upcoming obstacles and full experimentation- pose the threat of pulling the organization onto a pragmatic pathway? In other words, does not this strategy bring conformism in the name of the survival of the organization and reproduce the dominant capitalist system? While Gibson-Graham criticize “the essentialist and structuralist” ways of thinking, do not they overemphasize the role of agency (characteristic of post-structuralism?) and ethical decision-making?

Pragmatism need not be connected to conformism and absorption into a logic of capitalism: pragmatism can refer to a focus on problem-solving in which there are still ethical constraints on what counts as a solution, but in which the deliberation and creativity is not subordinated to ideological templates about institutional designs and the like. That can lead to drift towards capitalism, but not inherently.

Fourthly, in light of this, I would like to discuss the case of Mondragon in detail, especially its overseas operations in terms of exclusion of noncooperators. While we can agree with Gibson-Graham that this makes Mondragon a hybrid, to what degree is this process reversible –as they argue-? What are the parameters, if there are any, for the case of Mondragon to be replicable in other contexts if we accept it as a success story? And to what extent can we argue that an anti-capitalist ideology plays a role in the emergence of community economies? This question is interesting since even Gibson-Graham's account relies heavily on the discourse of development and well-being of local populations. **I think the implication of GGs analysis is that the ideology that drives community economics need not be “anti”-capitalist. It does not have to be anchored as a negation of anything; it can simply be an affirmative ideology around reciprocity, the commons, community, etc.**

7. Taylan Acar

-To what extent the community economy does break with the capitalist naturalness of the appropriation and distribution processes? To me it looks like the world of economies Gibson-Graham outline and base their whole argument on includes the capitalist economy as well. So, it does not ignore the existence of a market and production of goods and services for this market.

Moreover, in the case of Philippines example, the alternative economy relies on remittances, which in fact emerge as a result of the most precarious form of wage-labor. In this regard, Gibson-Graham talk a lot about the alternative market and non-market exchange relations. However, I wonder how should we define the relationship between these three worlds of exchange? **GG definitely reject the “naturalness” of capitalism insofar as they reject the “naturalness” of every social form – they are militantly anti-essentialist. They do not, however, reject the possibility that capitalism can be part of the diversity-economy without undermining the community-aspects.**

-Resocializing the economy: necessity, surplus, consumption, and commons. Diverse community economy, produce social surplus in a variety of forms, and not just surplus value, as it is this surplus that can be used to replenish and expand the commons and the productive base. This is a nice way of conceptualization towards a theory of social economy. How could we make use of these terms in our own theorization? For our own study on health care, I think, thus far we already discussed the health care in relation to these concepts.

-I do not think what happens in Philippines is not unique to there. Every region, country attains historically developed own functioning of economy with respect to its own cultural characteristics. The problem is ‘the Economy’ constant attacks to these existing economies, pulling more non-market economic activities into the market, creating more surplus value and commodifying more goods and services. **[Is it “the economy” that attacks, or is it capitalism that attacks?]** How are the ways to render these alternative spheres sustainable and resilient against the assaults of the market capitalism; mostly initiated by the state power in collaboration with global capitalist firms? To me it requires a political agency. How does this political will to achieve a rupture from market economy fit to the Gibson-Graham and Laclau’s proposition of ‘starting with ourselves’ idea? **I think this is absolutely correct – GGs argument tends to minimize the nondiscursive e forms of power that block and destroy alternatives.**

-I also would like to spend some time discussing the critique of revolutionary socialists towards worker cooperatives and to what extent they are credible in today’s discussion—though how revolutionary Webbs is open to question. But that issue should be handled in a separate discussion.

8. Lindsey Twin

Gibson-Graham seeks to develop a new language to reinstate the economy as a domain for community voice. Economic decision-making has social and environmental implications for “us all.” A part of this project is de-naturalizing what constitutes exchange, labor, and enterprise, because they are typically posed as static and natural forms and processes of capitalism. An advantage of posing an economy with static variables it that it is possible to produce simple and elegant models that predict its outputs at an instant in time, given only its inputs at that time. Outside of external shocks, pricing mechanisms stabilize and reproduce production and exchange relations in a steady state of optimal allocation.

Gibson-Graham states that she approaches the economy from the standpoint of a “weak theory” of historical change where the processes that reproduce production and exchange relations dynamically transform them over time. However, the author did not provide explanation of how the system's current state develops from its history of interdependencies between prices and quantities, production and distribution, markets for goods and factors, and the actions of class actors. Instead, Gibson-Graham highlights and categorizes different forms of labor, exchange, and enterprises within and outside the economy and contrasts them against the totality of capitalism in really interesting ways. For instance, the chart dividing labor hours by household, government and commodity production poses a radically different framework for looking at labor time.

I think that by merely looking at labor, exchange and enterprise in terms of market, non-market and alternative market, the author obscures important similarities and differences between “alternatives” and the means by which they relate to capitalism. **[I am not quite sure why you feel that their framework obscures important similarities and differences, since revealing the multidimensionality of similarities and differences is precisely what their framework tries to do.]** What does this framework add? **[The framework provides a much more comprehensive inventory of forms-of-variation in economic practices than most accounts, and therefore opens up an agenda of trying to understanding how these interact and how binding are the constraints on action imposed by one or another of these forms.]** What does it obscure? What kinds of considerations can we employ to analyze these categories with that would increase their explanatory power? Are labor, exchange, and enterprise the most important variables for conceptualizing community economy or are there others we should add?

9. Michael Billeaux

- How useful is it to dispense with the so-called “capitalocentric discourse”?
- How are alternatives established if not with respect to capitalism?
- What is the relationship between “the market” and capitalism? Is a capitalist institution necessarily a market institution? What does this mean for the “diverse economy” conception?

The explicit theoretical assumption of this piece is that discourse has “constitutive power,” i.e., that discourse is *constitutive* of reality, and that therefore discourses should be at the center of transformative political projects. This is contrasted with an “extradiscursive” representation of the capitalist economy, a “capitalocentric” discourse wherein capitalism is the “ultimate real and natural form of economy.” Even critical analyses engage with and therefore reproduce capitalocentrism when they, for example, compare alternative economic forms to capitalism. The “language of the diverse economy” offered by the authors as an alternative eschews deterministic causal relationships and endogenous, self-regulation of the economic sphere in favor of contingent factors. In general, in their description of the (capitalist?) economic system, they dislodge commodity production and wage-labor from the center, allowing other forms of economic practice (e.g., work compensated in a non-monetary nature) to occupy this position. **Much hinges in their discussion of precisely what it means to claim that something is at the “center” of economic life. Their view – I think – is that the very idea of there being a center – something that is “more important” than something else, or more fundamental,**

or more determining, etc., is incoherent. There are only elements that are at the center of discourses but nothing is at the center of reality. So, they are not really replacing capitalocentric discourses with communitiocentric discourse, but rather with a radically decentered discourse.

Their description of the diverse economy is useful for thinking about how the capitalist economy deviates from the ideal-type. But their above approach goes far past the correction of highly mechanical conceptions of capitalism on the one hand and world-views which render capitalism as the “only” system on the other; indeed, neither is necessarily implied by a conception of capitalism that holds it to be the dominant way in which society is organized, that it is reproduced by endogenous processes, etc. Nor is an assumption of perfectly free markets necessary for a conception of capitalism as the dominant mode of production (pg 62 for a suggestion otherwise). Finally, the argument that comparing capitalism to alternative economic forms is only reproductive of the capitalocentric discourse that is, in the first place, repressing our transformative potential (or something) seems like it is going too far. It seems like, adopting this framework, it would become very difficult to talk about what sort of alternative economic practices are **essentially** capitalist, reproductive of capitalism, corrosive of capitalism, representative of alternatives to capitalism, etc. **[The key idea, which is very elusive, is that NOTHING has an essence – nothing is essentially anything. Everything gets both its meaning in discourses and generates its effects in the world ONLY through contingent interactions/interrelationships with other things.]** I'm just not sure I understand this emphasis on discourses. How can we have a conversation about getting past capitalism without constant comparison with capitalism, and how can that comparison be made if we refuse to accept the idea that capitalism is the dominant mode of production, rather than just one of many equally central and important modes?

Yet the authors, in fact, *do* begin a discussion of non-capitalist economic activities with respect to capitalism; specifically, they argue away any endogenous reproductive capacity of capitalism and instead partially explain the reproduction of capitalist relations through non-capitalist economic activities (see pg 92. Reproduction is “miraculous” in the face of the private appropriation of surplus by capitalists who, in the view of the authors, apparently have no systematic incentive to partake in activity that would be reproductive to capitalism, such as reinvestment). On pgs 72-3 they explicitly call this kind of reading a capitalocentric one.

The authors argue that markets and capitalism should not be conflated. Does this go in both directions, or just one? In other words, if we agree that not all markets are capitalist, should we also expect it to be the case that not all capitalist formations are based primarily on market principles? **[They seem to be comfortable with the term “state capitalism”, which suggests at least that capitalist activity can be engaged in alternative market rather than conventional market transactions, but I am not sure how they defend this description.]** The authors seem to only worry about the conflation in one direction. For example, the authors show us visual representations of the diverse economy (pg 69) wherein capitalist commodity production represents less than half of the whole amount of hours worked in society. The point is very powerful if the assumption is accepted that the only capitalist portion of the economy is that which is labeled as capitalist commodity production in the chart. There should be more time devoted to articulating and justifying this assumption, for it includes a number of highly loaded

claims, such as that cooperative firms are non-capitalist (rather than, say, a hybrid); that independent commodity production is non-capitalist; and that household and government production are non-capitalist. (This is also all confusing to me because I'm not sure how to interpret the very categories "capitalist" and "non-capitalist" used by the authors in the context of the argument against a capitalocentric discourse outlined in the above paragraphs).

[Capitalocentric arguments are more than simply positing the existence of capitalist forms; it is ascribing those forms with some kind of structural power or structural centrality and naturalness. My feeling is that one can ascribe structural power to capitalist forms without seeing these as "natural" or treating a structural power in a deterministic manner. A structural power can impose constraints, create tendencies, generate probabilities, produce effects whose consequences in the world depend on contingent interactions, etc.]

In the end I think the "capitalocentric discourse" – if by that we mean an acknowledgment of capitalism as the dominant mode of production, whereby other modes of production are relegated to a **marginal position**; and a conception of the economy as a sphere that is composed of, regulated, and reproduced by something more than our discursive orientation toward it – should be defended. It makes sense to talk about the persistence of slave labor, unpaid domestic labor, self-employment, volunteer labor, and the like; it doesn't make sense to place them at the center of an analysis of a society dominated by the capitalist mode of production, or to analytically demolish the distinction between "central" and "marginal." It is not clear to me why we should avoid talking about a "center" and its "margins." It is, however, extremely valuable to talk about the relationship of these marginal non-capitalist economic forms with the central mode of production. Indeed that is a discussion entailed precisely by the recognition of transformative potential in social economic institutions. **[We are getting to the crux of the matter here: what *precisely* does it mean to claim (a) that capitalism is dominant, and (b) that other forms are "marginal." GG basically reject the idea that ANYTHING can be dominant in a system. This is what their version of "overdetermination" is all about. Everything is interaction among elements; elements do not constitute autonomous causal powers in which one can be identified as primary or fundamental. Noncapitalist production is not marginal in contemporary economies nor is capitalism dominant: they both coexist and through their interactions the effects in the world we experience are generated.]**

10. Joo-hee Park

Gibson-Graham (2006) disapprove of "essentialist and structural readings" of Mondragon. They explain that both attributing Mondragon's success to its inherent circumstances, and understanding Mondragon's shortcomings as the inherent weakness of cooperative form, tend to conclude that Mondragon experiment is not replicable. Instead, they suggest reading Mondragon in terms of "decisions taken and challenges undertaken." For example, "many explanations of Mondragon can be read as challenges successfully faced, rather than as structural or circumstantial guarantors of success"(103).

When I first learned about Mondragon in Whyte & Whyte (1991), what impressed me was the role of Father Arizmendi and the studies groups he run even before they began the first cooperative. Gibson-Graham also says that there were two thousand study circles on social,

humanist, and religious topics. While the study groups' topics were broad, the religion appeared one of the important momentums to cultivate the first cooperators' commitments. If I simply conclude that the common religious background is a condition for the success of Mondragon, this would be an essentialist way of reading it.

If I read the story differently (that is, in terms of decision taken and challenges undertaken), what can I take away from the story? If we understand economy as "a site of decisions", cultivating "ethical communal subjects" can be an important challenge to build an alternative economy. In Mondragon, it appears that social Catholicism tradition has played some role initially, and that cooperative participation system itself plays the role later. How can we cultivate ethical communal subjects to build community economy in our society? Many people in current society seek existential questions and answers in religious spaces. If a religious group becomes reflexive enough to recognize the sociality of existence (such as social Catholicism tradition in Arizmendi's time), can they be an important momentum for community/solidarity economy? **[I am always somewhat mystified by the character of the "anti-essentialism" position. If one says that in order for a long-term, robust cooperative economy to work there needs to be constructed some form of "ethical communal subject", but that this can be done in many different ways, with many different symbolic foundations, etc., is this "essentialism" or "anti-essentialism"? It is anti-essentialism insofar as it doesn't say that the essence of religion is an ethical communal subject, or the only way to build an ethical communal subject is through religion, but it is essentialist in arguing that a necessary (essential) condition for a robust cooperative is the construction one way or another of such a subject.**

11. Eunhee Han.

Community Economy is constructed by two words, "Community" and "Economy." We may know relatively well about "economy": There are various types of economic activity, and capitalism is just one type of transaction among a heterogeneous economic activities. Gibson and Graham support this statement by demonstrating that when we take into account non-capitalist economic transactions (household economy, government transactions, gifts, etc), considerably less than half of all economic transactions can be described as market-based capitalist economic exchange. In "Community Economy", economy implies diverse forms of economic activities including ethical decisions.

In contrast, as they recognized, the term "community" is still fuzzy. They even rely on Singer's statement of "community as a call to becoming of something yet to be defined." So I wonder how we define and operationalize "community".

As they stated, "it is an interesting irony that in the current neoliberal political and economic climate, in which individualism is promoted as an unquestioned social good, all over the world the term community has increasingly come to the fore." (p.84). There is existing discourse of the community economy which adapts the language in the Figure 23 (e.g., case studies in World Bank reports). How do we differentiate community economy as a form of post-capitalist economy from the existing discourse of community economy? **[GG might even argue that the use of community within the neoliberal discourses of the world bank in fact reflects the ways in which the diversity of economic practices seeps into even the most economic of**

capitalocentric discourses. Perhaps this is really community intruding in spite of the essentialism of those discourses.

12. Trevor Young-Hyman

How does JKGG compare to Wright's conception of the social economy?

By focusing on community-based discursive practices and local contingency, instead of organizational structures and state-market relations, does the JKGG approach to the alternative economy produce a more or less useful analytical frame for envisioning and realizing the social economy?

JKGG argue that an alternative to capitalism **is possible** and the construction of this alternative is a political project, requiring the cultivation of individuals who are more creative and self-reflexive subjects. **[They actually argue something even stronger than just "possibility"; they argue that it exists, is vibrant, and is not even in the present marginal relative to capitalism.]** The challenge is to "make visible the hidden and alternative economic activities that *everywhere* abound, and to connect them through a language of economic difference." (xxiv) JKGG resist arguments that theorize universal or systemic obstacles to an alternative economy, instead suggesting that the obstacles just like opportunities are locally contingent, embedded in practices, and unstable. They also argue against the construction of ideal typical organizational models, for the same reasons of contingency. For JKGG, the focus should not be on identifying gaps in the system or constructing models, but in practicing 'weak theory' that explores spaces of alternative possibilities.

Several aspects of JKGG's argument stand in contrast to other theorists of the social economy. First, some others hypothesize that the social or alternative economy emerges in locations where the state and market fail to effectively provide resources or services. This means that the social economy may serve as a real 'alternative' source of empowerment or it may serve as a repository for state abdication. Second, in order for empowerment or transformation to emerge, a key determining factor is the democratic character of the social economy organization's institutional structure.

On the first point, I am not convinced that JKGG offer a more convincing analysis. When JKGG discuss cases, they never point to examples of the alternative economy emerging in places where we would not expect it. They never discuss cases of the alternative economy emerging in contexts where the market economy is vibrant or the state bureaucracy is highly competent. In fact, they state that all of their cases "have experienced economic dislocation wrought by processes including privatization, deindustrialization, sectoral restructuring, rapid growth, and stagnation." (xxii) **[I like the basic issue you pose here: should alternatives be views as "filling gaps" or are alternatives simply diverse forms within the overall ecology of economic practices in a social context? It could be both, of course: the existence of gaps may provide an opportunity for the deliberate creation of new alternatives where it would otherwise be more difficult – that is, "gaps" may have strategic importance for activists seeking to construct something new or expand something. But it could also be the case that**

most alternatives are not gap-filling but simply diverse practices: cooking dinner at home for friends and families does not reflect a “failure” of the market to provide more restaurants or the state to provide soup kitchens.]

On the second point, I’m not sure whether JKGG’s framing is better. A key difference between their conceptualization and that of others is that they focus at the community level instead of the organizational level. *Does this obscure the importance of organizational structure?*

Can JKGG’s theorization of alternative capitalism can “foster connection among a plurality of movements, contributing to a counterhegemonic “postcapitalist” project of resignification and enactment”?

JKGG claim that each potential site of alternative capitalism is contingent and distinct, and that a united movement risks a new hegemony, but that various sites of opposition may be linked by a common discourse. On one hand, they encourage communities to think of what is (1) necessary to survival, (2) how social surplus is appropriated and distributed, (3) modes of consumption, and (4) sustainability and production of the commons. Then, they encourage the generation of self-reflexivity and awareness among the population. It is not clear that these steps would foster any kind of connection among local movements.