

>RADICALLY REASSESSING “THE ECONOMIC”



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Image: One of the current challenges is to achieve a sustainable economy that is more efficient for the vast majority.



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>RADICALLY REASSESSING “THE ECONOMIC”

Critically challenging mainstream representations of “the economic”, the chapter draws on empirical research to inform an economic imaginary based on diversity and difference. Re-thinking the economic is argued to be vital at a time of crisis and perplexity, particularly if it encourages a radical re-appraisal and re-valuing of non-capitalist forms of work and organisation in everyday western society. While emphasising the need for greater recognition of the interconnected and overlapping nature of contrasting economic typologies, the chapter concludes by arguing that utopian visions of a capitalist society, based on “full-employment”, should be rejected in favour of “post-capitalist” societies based on full and meaningful forms of engagement.

Introduction

Our contemporary epoch - the *Anthropocene* – is being increasingly defined by an unprecedentedly violent and dystopian tapestry, woven by the entangled threads of economic, social and ecological crisis. Though global in nature, from a European perspective, these statistics help illustrate the depth and extent of some of the key socio-economic problems faced at this time:

In 2015, almost 119 million people, or 23.7 % of the EU population, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This means roughly one in four people in the EU experienced at least one of the following three forms of poverty or social exclusion: monetary poverty, severe material deprivation, or very low work household intensity. (Eurostat, 2017, n.p.)

The challenge of ‘how’ to effectively, constructively and decisively move toward a “post-crisis” world of prosperity, social justice and environmental sustainability is, without doubt, *the* most important and pressing challenge of our time. Here, critically appraising the key responses that radiate strongly across a broad spectrum of mainstream academic, policy-making and media commentaries alike, offer instruction and insight (though not in the way intended). Though their solutions proffered to the question of crisis may differ somewhat in degree, they are almost exclusively anchored around a belief that all future happiness, freedom and *joie de vivre* is bound to, and indeed utterly dependent upon, the success of something confidently referred to as “the economy.” “The economy” so we are told is in crisis, and it is this crisis that threatens to end the world as we know it (Shannon, 2014).

Steeped in this particular economic imaginary, “experts” across the political economic spectrum unquestioningly assume that societies must be prepared and willing to make *some* sacrifices at “the economic” altar, in order for a resurgent economy to bestow prosperity and riches upon wider society. In this respect, the serious debates concern just how much sacrifices citizens should endure, and where and in what form. Given the privileging of “the economic”, should the medicine prescribed to remedy economic ills prove toxic to the general societal wellbeing and freedom then this is entirely justifiable. How else can we begin to understand the political aptitude to invest trillions of pounds of public money in response to the global financial and “economic” crisis that emerged in 2007-8? Indeed, in the UK alone “...at the peak of the crisis, the government had committed the astronomical sum of £1.162 trillion of public money to provide loans, share purchases and guarantees to its errant banks” (Cumbers, 2012, 1-2)? How else can we understand not only the hard-fisted resolve and determination to forcibly impose full-blown austerity policies and state retrenchment in the face of vociferous popular contestation, struggles and resistance, but also to maintain austerity measures *despite* ever increasing levels of poverty, job insecurity, homelessness, social exclusion and mental suffering? All of these individual and collective social consequences of austerity regimes were not widely predicated and anticipated (see Armingeon et al., 2016; Blyth, 2013; Davies and Blanco, 2017; Pantazis, 2016; Varoufakis, 2016). What holds this mainstream economic narrative together is the insistence that we (the people) must trust and have faith in our expertise not only of our economic elites to see us safely through the crisis, but also in the benevolent, ‘tough-love’ nature of the state. We are, so we are repeatedly told, ‘all in it together’. To question this is to provoke an altogether threatening and intimidating four word response, one designed to ensure conformity through threat and provoking fear: ‘there is no alternative’.

“THIS IS A TIME FOR POWERFUL NEW STORIES TO BE TOLD ABOUT THE ECONOMY IN WAYS THAT BETTER CAPTURE AND REFLECT COMPLEX TRUTH AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF THE ECONOMIC.”

But what if this dominant story about the economy and society, what it constitutes and what our relation to it is in the 21st century rests on a spurious foundation of falsehoods, myths and wishful, uncritical utopian thinking: what then? Arguing that this is indeed the case, the thread running through the chapter is one that aims to impress upon the reader that, at a deep and profound level, the economic crisis of our time is firmly rooted in a broader crisis of imagination that colonise the ways in which we think about what is possible, practical and enactable and achievable. Yet, the ability to foster ever new, more creative and radical imaginaries; imaginaries that will inspire new economic and

community sites into the world, is absolutely fundamental if we are to move more confidently toward desirable “post-crisis” societies that embrace social, economic and environmental justice for all.

Put simply, this is a time for powerful new stories to be told about the economy in ways that better capture and reflect complex truth and creative potential of the economic. To this end, drawing on empirical evidence that focuses on the geographies of work and organisation in the UK in particular, the aim of the chapter is to agitate for a radical re-assessment of “the economic” to challenge mainstream discourse. This will be achieved in three related ways, namely by critically reflecting on: (i) what constitutes “the economic” and how this should be better represented; (ii) what is the relationship between work and society (ii) how can we be empowered in ways that allow us to begin to *think* differently and creatively about the economic in future visions of work and organisation, inspired by expressions of solidarity and support that are familiar to us in the here and now?

Rethinking “The Economic”

A key starting point then is an obvious one: to problematise what is meant by “the economic”. The contention here is that a mainstream understanding of “the economic” is based on a particularly thin and inadequate reading of economic organisation and exchange. What is actually being referred to in mainstream narratives is not “the economic” but capitalism, which is just *one* particular mode of economic organisation that governs the way in which goods and services can be produced, exchanged and consumed in society; one based “around the systematic pursuit of profit in the marketplace” (Williams, 2005, 13). As will be shown later, by recognising the pervasive nature of *non*-capitalist modes of work and organisation in society, and appreciating how these inform a thicker reading of “the economic”, any reference to “the economic” as interchangeable with ‘capitalism’ is inexcusable. In the same way, to propagandise the view that society is capitalist, and its future inescapably locked into a capitalist discourse is dangerous nonsense (see White and Williams, 2014). However, such is the success and power of this capitalist realism though, that to *think* otherwise is a task that is neither easy nor straightforward. Indeed, the extent to which this capitalism has colonised the economic imaginary is perfectly captured in the refrain that it is easier to imagine the end of the world, than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.

To successfully begin to challenge this orthodoxy, it is fundamental to re-assess the economic in ways that captures and explores its inherently heterodox and dynamic nature(s). Here we must also theorise in ways that contextualise *our* relationship to the economic that embeds rather than uncouples “the economic” within wider social and cultural relations. Constructing an economy of difference and diversity can be achieved from the bottom-up, from where we find ourselves

now. This is the opposite approach to that seen in formal economics, which perpetuates a totalizing discourse referred to by feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham (2006a, 6) as “capitalocentric”:

“other forms of economy (not to mention noneconomic aspects of social life) are understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as existing in capitalism’s space of orbit.”

Thankfully, when acknowledging the centrality of diverse economic worlds we engage in, and the complexity, desirability and complex coming together of these worlds across (our) time and space, the invitation to rethink the economic in more expansive and colourful ways requires no great leap of faith, no abstract thought, or indeed much feat of imagination! Indeed, perversely, it is the narrowing of ‘the economic’ in a way that begins and ends with capitalism that necessitates a strenuous exertion of denial to render invisible - and valueless - all the multifarious ways which we organise ourselves, and our societies, in meaningful and intentional ways.

Capitalist realism advocates that any economic activity is a natural manifestation of capitalism.



Rejecting capitalocentric readings of the economic also demands a radical re-imagining of the values and visibility ascribed to ‘other’ forms of work and organisation that we, and others, harness in our day-to-day lives. What forms, and for what reasons, do we organise work within our households and local communities for example? How extensive are “non-capitalist” economies? What rationales underpin the coping strategies we use? What barriers prevent our preferred modes of work and organised from being achieved? How do responses fit with an economic imaginary that tells us that we live in - indeed are locked into - a capitalist society? The challenge then moves to consider how we consciously occupy this economic ontology of difference, in ways that acknowledge the intersectional nature of different economic modes of organisation, and appreciate capitalist and non-capitalist forms of economic organisation as relational (to some extent) rather than oppositional. Underpinning all of this is the need to acknowledge and understand the uneven presence of different types of work and organisation rooted in a spatial and temporal consciousness: literally how our relationship to “the economic” changes as a consequence of where we happen *to be* at any particular moment in time.

“THE ORGANISATION OF THESE ROUTINE, ORDINARY TASKS SAY SOMETHING OF SIGNIFICANCE CONCERNING OF SENSE OF IDENTITY, AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE AROUND US.”

Through a combination of direct questions - which to encourage personal reflection and awareness in the reader, alongside wider empirical findings, the chapter continues by drawing attention toward some of the ways in which the richness, depth and diversity of “the economy” have been better captured and presented in existing research. In re-assessing the economic as a landscape of plurality and difference, an argument is made concerning the importance to problematize overtly essentialist, binary representations of different types of economies e.g. “capitalist/ non-capitalist post-capitalist”; “mainstream/ alternative”; “formal/ informal”. Taking care not to romanticise or essentialise different economic typologies, the chapter concludes by inviting ways in which a re-assessment of the diverse forms of economic work and organisation might yet inspire and inform a “post-crisis” future society built on full and meaningful engagement.

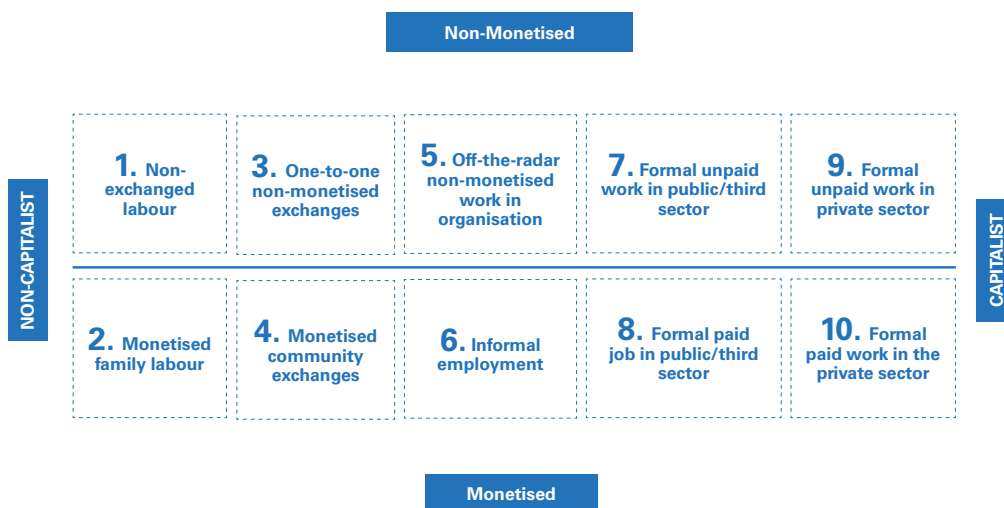
Appreciating the Importance of Diverse Economies of Work and Organisation in Our Everyday Lives

Imagine a researcher knocked on your front door, armed with a clipboard, a questionnaire and pen. You answered the door and invited them to ask their

questions. The questionnaire began by exploring a number of regular, household jobs, that ranged from *property maintenance* (e.g. outdoor painting, indoor decorating, wallpapering); *property improvement* (e.g. DIY activities, building an extension, putting in central heating); *routine housework* (e.g. washing dishes or clothes, cooking meals, doing the shopping, cleaning windows); *garden activities* (sweeping paths, planting, moving the lawn); *caring activities* (childminding, looking after animals, educational activities - tutoring); and *vehicle maintenance* (repairing/ washing cars, bikes etc). Considering each task in turn, you were asked whether the job had been done in the house (and when)? Who did the work (the respondent? Another member of the household? A friend? Neighbour? Professional?) Did you pay them in some way for the work undertaken (if so was it cash-in-hand, or perhaps a gift in lieu of money?); Why did you come to this arrangement for getting the work done? Forty six tasks later the first part of the questionnaire was completed! The second part asked similar questions, but this time was interested in whether you, or members of the household, had engaged in work for other people. The final section of the questionnaire then explored some of the barriers to participation to completing tasks using household labour/ other people. For you and for many others, the invitation to think consciously about the 'how' and 'who' and 'why' work is organised to complete these domestic tasks would be a rare one: they just are. In many ways, though, the organisation of these routine, ordinary tasks say something of significance concerning sense of identity, and our relationships with those around us.

These work practice questions form part of the mixed methodological Household Work Practice Studies carried out in the UK, which can be traced to the research conducted in the late 1970s on the Isle of Sheppey by the sociologist Ray Pahl (1984). It has been revised and harnessed most effectively in recent decades through the empirical research focused on the geographies of community self-help "those informal activities that are not formally provided by the market and the state" (Burns et al. 2004, 29) and the limits to capitalism (Williams 2005, Williams and Windebank, 2016). Reflecting on your responses to these doorstep questions, how many different types of work practices did you draw on to complete the tasks investigated? How would you distinguish and define these typologies of labour practices? In the alternative economies many attempts to conceptualise, capture and visibly illustrate (a) the multifarious nature of work practices evident in contemporary society, and (b) their relative relationship(s) to each other have emerged. Here Gibson-Graham (2014, 2016b) has been particularly influential, though one of the most complex representations of the diversity of economic practices is Williams's (2010) total social organisation of labour, a version of which is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Re-presenting an economy based on diversity and difference



Source: Adapted from White and Williams (2016, 327)

These complex, ‘thicker’ representations of economic praxis are rich with radical implications and possibilities for radical reassessing ‘the economic’. Significantly, in this representation different economic typologies are never entirely separate, rather they overlap and merge into each other to a degree. This is illustrated both by the use of ‘hatched’ lines, and by indicating on the ‘x’ axis where they are more capitalist/ non-capitalist based, and on the ‘y’ axis, where they are more monetised or non-monetised. Most obviously such representations challenge the propaganda of capitalocentrism (which reifies capitalism as the central and most significant economic practice in ‘advanced economies’) by more correctly depicting capitalism as one form of economic organisation among many.

The negation of any natural or inevitable ‘economic core’ (still less a capitalist one!), and the juxtaposition of capitalism alongside other everyday economic typologies that animate the “the economic” of the western world, is potentially both liberating and exciting, not least when it comes to thinking creatively about possible economic futures (beyond/ “post” capitalism). When the abstracted economic representation is plunged into the richness and messiness of everyday life, how might this sense of liberation and potential be opened up, or closed down? Could it be the case that a “capitalist” mode of economic organisation does in reality occupy a quantitatively central position at the heart of our society? (one in which we are told *there is no alternative to!*).

When “the household” and community have been taken as the starting points of enquiry about the 21st century economies of work and organisation, a number of significant findings have emerged, which have exposed the myths that refer to

the dominance and deep penetration of ‘the market’ in the nooks and crannies of everyday life. One key source of data, which has enriched our understanding of the extent and nature of diverse economies across the world have been obtained through Time Use Surveys (TUS). In recent decades, TUS have become a key research instrument in the UK, Europe and beyond. Illustrating the approach and methodology Gershuny and Sullivan used, (2017) note that:

The United Kingdom Time Use Survey, 2014-2015 (UKTUS) is a large-scale household survey that provides data on how people aged 8 years and over in the UK spend their time. At the heart of the survey is a time diary instrument in which respondents record their daily activities. Time diaries record events sequences for prescribed periods, usually a single day. They are an effective means of capturing rich data on how people spend their time, their location throughout the day, and who they spend their time with. The sample was based on households, and household members eight years and over completed time-diaries for one weekday and one weekend day. In addition, those in paid work were asked to complete a weekly work schedule. All individuals who completed a time diary were invited to take part in an interview, and someone in the household was selected to take part in a household interview. These interviews provide additional demographic, economic, and social information about households and individuals.

TUS have been influential in offering a robust evidence base to inform a clearer understanding of the nature and changing trajectory of economies over time and space. Focused on so-called ‘advanced’ economies of the western world for example, the findings from Time Use Surveys have rejected the idea that (a) capitalism (paid work) is anywhere near as extensive as they are imagined/ purported to be, and indeed (b) that capitalist practices become more dominant over time. For example Burns et al (2004, 52), focusing on the proportion of people’s total work time spent on unpaid work in the United Kingdom, France and the United States concluded that:

“over half of all the time that people spend working is unpaid. Despite a decline in the absolute amount of time spent in both [paid] employment and unpaid work, the time spent in unpaid work is declining slower. This means that work beyond employment, is not only larger than [paid] employment (measure in terms of the volume of time inputs) but over the past 30 years, it has taken up a greater share of the total time that we spend working.”

Indeed, the Office for National Statistics (2016) sought to attribute a monetary value for the total unpaid work performed in 2014 just by UK households. They estimated that “total unpaid work had a value of £1.01tn, equivalent to approximately 56% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)”!

The Household Work Practice Survey (HWPS), which we drew attention to earlier in the section has been conducted in UK households within urban and rural areas, and across both affluent and deprived communities. Table 1 shows

the key findings taken from over 860 UK households in relating their participation rates across different labour practices.

Table 1 Household Work Practice Survey UK: type of labour practices used to conduct tasks by locality-type (UK)

% tasks last conducted using:	Deprived urban	Affluent urban	Deprived rural	Affluent rural	All areas
<i>Monetised labour</i>					
Formal paid job in private sector	12	15	18	22	16
Formal paid job in public and third sector	2	2	2	2	2
Informal employment	2	8	<1	4	2
Monetised community exchange	3	1	4	1	3
Monetised family labour	1	<1	1	1	1
<i>Non-monetised labour</i>					
Formal unpaid work in private sector	<1	0	<1	<1	<1
Formal unpaid work in public & third sector	<1	0	<1	0	<1
Off the radar/ non-monetised work in organisations	<1	0	<1	0	0
One-to-one non monetised exchanges	4	2	8	7	6
Non-exchanged labour	76	72	67	63	70
Total	100	100	100	100	100
χ^2	102.89	29.87	89.76	28.88	-

Note: $\chi^2 > 12.838$ in all cases, leading us to reject H_0 within a 99.5 per cent confidence interval that there are no spatial variations in the sources of labour used to complete the 44 household services.

Source: White and Williams (2012, 1635)

The statistics are drawn from a similar range of questions that the hypothetical researcher-on-your-doorstep invited you to answer. Cross-referencing these findings with your own material coping strategies may prove an illuminating exercise. One of the most striking findings revealed by the HHWP is that “non-exchanged labour” (i.e. unpaid household labour) accounted for 70 per cent of all completed tasks investigated. Conversely just 16% of labour in all areas was undertaken via a formal paid job sourced in the private sector! So much for the all-powerful, all-pervasive spectre of capitalism, from which we are told ‘there is no alternative’! Quite the reverse is true: far from being marginal or irrelevant, the non-capitalist forms of work continues to be absolutely fundamental to undertake a wide spectrum of jobs in today’s society.

A necessary question to ask here is that of motivation: are the over-riding rationales that underpinned these diverse coping strategies undertaken through choice? The findings here once again refute any assumption that households were using their own labour because of economic necessity (i.e. the need to save money). Across both lower and higher income households the principal rationales for participation identified were framed by economic (to save money/ because formal labour was too expensive) and non-economic terms: including ease, choice and pleasure (see Williams, 2005). Significantly, in *both* affluent and deprived areas, the majority of households cited non-economic rationales as the determining reason why the tasks were undertaken in the way that they were. In short the patterns we see in terms of how unpaid work contributes to the well-being of individuals, families - and society more generally - are mainly the outcome of choice and preference, rather than determined by economic circumstances and constraint.

There are many radical implications that come from recognising the pervasive nature of 'non-capitalist' forms of work in western society. Two connected themes, which are intended to provoke further questions and reflection beyond this chapter, will be addressed here. The first is this: how should we be encouraged to reassess the meaning of 'work', and indeed what constitutes 'meaningful' work in society? The second aims to provoke a greater awareness of the interconnected and overlapping nature of different typologies of work and organisation within the economy, particularly the ways in which participation in one economic sphere (e.g. capitalist) is dependent on our -and/ or others- engagement in other (non-capitalist) economic spheres. Collectively these should offer new ways to better appreciate, value and make visible the diverse economy in the here and now, *and* constructive ways toward harnessing desirable post-crisis and post-capitalist futures of work and organisation.

Before continuing, the temptation to essentialise typologies of work and organisation must always be resisted, and replaced by critical interrogation of the (alternative) economic and political configurations (see Fuller et. al, 2010). For example, the idea that rich examples of solidarity, love, care and support are evident in "non-capitalist" places of work may well be true in many cases, but not all cases: and they should not be romanticised as if they were. Referring to the household as a key unit of analysis ,for example, far from being one of liberation, it is (and continues to be) a potent incubator for patriarchal and other forms of repression, suppression, exploitation and violence (see Hartmann, 1981; Bowlby et al, 1997). This of course has manifested itself in the traditional gendered divisions of household labour. Here entrenched gender norms and stereotypes about "women's work" - typically the caring activities, and the never-ending, mundane and less fulfilling tasks like ironing, cooking, ironing, washing - abound. In contrast 'men's work' is typically, though not exclusively, of an altogether more physical and skilful and occasional nature - think of the

DIY activities, decorating, plumbing and car maintenance. In such a traditional relationship, the male household was 'the breadwinner', who went out [sic] to work and provide for his [sic] family. 'Women's work' was of course confined to the confines of 'the house'. This gender division is far from being relegated to a by-gone era. Mindful of the lack of understanding as to "why" and "how" questions as to how these tasks were negotiated within the households (and indeed *if* they was any negotiation), nevertheless, the Time Use survey highlighted earlier underpins some extremely concerning patterns. Given that female participation in the formal labour market has increased significantly over the last thirty years, there is still a highly disproportionate amount of household labour undertaken by women. For example Ferrant et. al. (2014) report that "Around the world, women spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men. In the UK (ONS, 2016) time use surveys indicate that "women put in more than double the proportion of unpaid work when it comes to

The amount of work that women face both in and out of the home reaches disproportionate limits.



cooking, childcare and housework... on average men do 16 hours a week of such unpaid work... to the 26 hours of unpaid work done by women a week."

We should also be encouraged toward a more nuanced reading of 'formal paid work in the private sector'. For many people engaging in paid work under capitalist relations is driven by necessity (to earn money). As has been widely explored, the working conditions fostered here are illustrative of the most brutal, unforgiving and alienating of experiences imaginable (Thompson, 1967; Ward, 1973; Gordon, 1997; Gibson-Graham, 2006a, b; Springer, 2014, 2016; Tyner, 2016). Yet this should not obscure the fact that even in the most exploitative of capitalist labour, examples of mutuality, care and solidarity persist. How might this recognition encourage "post-capitalist" spaces to emerge, that are rooted *within* capitalist forms of work and organisation is an important and overlooked question that demands further reflection.

Recognising the Overlapping Geographies of Diverse Economies: A Focus on Participation in Paid Work

Referring back to the economic typologies highlighted in Figure 1, it is easy to overlook how the opportunity, or pressure, to participate in one particular economic sphere is dependent upon successfully organising coping strategies that take place in other economic sphere(s). Crucially, 'thin', capitalocentric reading of "the economic" deliberately overlook the role and value of 'non-capitalist' work in many ways, not least in failing to recognise how this impacts on people's ability to participate in paid formal work! To illustrate this, I will consider my own engagement with 10: *Formal paid job in the private sector* in Figure 1. What this will hopefully illustrate is how my current level of participation in formal work is utterly predicated on the presence/ mutual agreement of significant others in my life to organise and engage successfully elsewhere.

My "full-time job" is a Reader in Human Geography at Sheffield Hallam University. It is 11.33am on Tuesday 01 August 2017, and I am sitting behind my office desk. So far, uncomplicated. However, when the 'formal paid labour in private sector' typology is juxtaposed with other typologies then from my *personal* perspective, a highly complex, network of mutual engagement and support emerges. As a father of three daughters, aged 12, 10 and 8, my ability to participate in formal work is entirely dependent upon other people caring for my children during work hours. At this precise moment, my children are currently enjoying their first week of school summer holidays, being looked after by my wife. I daresay if the weather improves sufficiently this afternoon then the younger two children will play with our next door neighbours children (aged 4 and 1). Following this, all three children will get into the family car and be driven to the local Leisure Centre to attend their weekly swimming clubs. When their sessions are over their paternal grandparents will collect them directly, drive them back to their house where they'll enjoy a sleep-over, and a 'day-out' tomorrow. Just a *cursory*

glance then as to the 'how' and 'why' I have come to be able to sit and write at my office desk paints a far more colourful, always inter-connected tapestry of people and forms of work and organisation that, it must be said, is rarely made visible (unless at a time of crisis). Minimally put, my engagement in "10", if the expectations of the day are met, is/ will be dependent on other social relations (kin and non-kin) and places (home, others households, other public places) that certainly include *1. Non-exchanged labour; 3 One-to-one non-monetised exchanges; 8. Formal paid labour in public/ third sector.*

In this way, to better appreciate the complex networks that make participation in 'formal work' possible, our reflections should extend to presence/ absence of other colleagues and employees not only in the same place of formal work. For the vast majority of individuals (I would suspect) that being able to successfully hold down a paid formal job involves, to a greater degree, working with and being dependent upon the presence/ absence of other people. Every one of these "other people" will each have their own unique and complex coping strategies that enable them to be paid for their labour in the private sector, and impact on your everyday experiences. Within my university for example, I depend on the largely invisible role of the campus support team, who ensures the smooth day-to-day running of the university in general, and my daily working environment. I am indebted to those individuals and teams who are responsible for cleaning, catering, portering, transport, mail, helpdesk/ reception, security, parking. On a more collegiate level, the success of collaborative research, teaching, writing, administration tasks and so on depend directly on my effectively communicating and co-ordinating with other members of my department and Faculty.

"OTHER DISPROPORTIONATE AND UNEVEN PRESSURES ON WORK PRACTICES HAVE COME AS DIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF AUSTERITY MEASURES."

Reflecting on the desire to have stabile and fine-tuned coping strategies in place to enable us to live in ways preferred, one of the many consequences of capitalism has been to continually exacerbate the exploitative and precarious nature of paid work, which consequently undermines, splinters and fragments other coping strategies. For example, The University and College Union (UCU 2017) cited empirical research which revealed that "People working in education are among those most likely to be putting in unpaid overtime and clocking up 12.1 free hours a week." More generally, Trade Union Council (TUC, 2017) reported that, "Over five million people at work in the UK regularly do unpaid overtime, giving their employers £33.6 billion of free work last year."

Other disproportionate and uneven pressures on work practices have come as direct consequences of austerity measures. These have been felt most acutely across already vulnerable households and population groups (e.g. young people,

ethnic minorities, elderly, single parents, women that were already forced to survive on low incomes (see Hall, 2017; Horemans et.al 2016; Ifanti et al. 2013; Lambie-Mumford and Green, 2017). Thus, how to effectively respond to this increasing precariat, in ways that help protect and empower those who are least able to defend themselves must be a primary concern when thinking about our future economies based on solidarity and social justice. To this end we must recognise our own individual and collective agency and reclaim our power to help achieve this. As Springer (2016, 289) argues:

When the political system is defined by, conditioned for, enmeshed within, and derived from capitalism, it can never represent our ways of knowing and being in the world, and so we need to take charge of these lifeways and reclaim our collective agency. We must start to become enactive in our politics and begin embracing a more relational sense of solidarity that recognizes that the subjugation and suffering of one is in fact indicative of the oppression of all.

Taking this challenge head on the concluding section argues for a radical reassessment of work and organisation in ways that more properly values and harness the multiple ways in which people already meaningfully participate in and contribute to society.

The many hours a person works are reflected in their relationships, especially among the most vulnerable sectors.



Beyond a Capitalist Society of “Full-Employment” and Toward “Post-Capitalist” Societies of Full and Meaningful Engagement

Embracing a thicker heterodox reading of ‘the economic’ recognises the centrality of many non-capitalist modes of organisation in everyday life, as well as their social embeddedness, and the (empowered) motivations behind them. This in turn brings into sharp focus questions of the nature of work itself: what is its value, its purpose and its relationship to society? What is meaningful work? Perpetuating a capitulo-centric reading of ‘meaningful and productive’ work and employment of course, fetishes “paid employment in the private sector”, and in doing so excludes so many forms of work that are vital and central to maintaining (economic) life and the everyday world as we know it. Moreover, it actively undermines the idea that non-capitalist forms of work can possess intrinsic value, and provide positive and desirable contributions to society in their own right. Such discourse is particularly evident in political faith invested in promoting capitalist growth based-economics, and its ongoing commitment to achieving a society of “full-employment” (see McKie et al. 2012; Williams, 2015).

If the shallow nature of this approach needs further emphasising, then consider the multiple, complex physical and emotional realities of the demanding forms of unpaid work that a “stay at home” parent takes on when managing the family household. Viewed through policy and popular discourse these individuals are afforded secondary status: popularly stigmatised as being “unemployed”. Indeed, a key part of the successful propaganda of capitalism realism has been to link those who secure formal employment with the positive attributes of desire, status, ambition, determination; these workers are ‘successful’ and make an ‘essential contribution’ to society. In direct contrast those who are not employed in paid work are comparatively lazy; they are a ‘drain’ on society, worthless, and expendable, and scapegoated in ways that “employed” citizens are not. Focusing on the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition UK Government which came to power 2010 Pantazis, (2016, 4) for example argued that

The Coalition government... rhetoric sought to portray individuals, including those previously regarded as ‘deserving’ of social security support as ‘shirkers’ (in contrast to ‘strivers’), ‘lazy’ (in contrast to ‘hard-working’), and ‘profligate’ (in contrast to ‘provident’), and responsible, in different ways, for bringing poverty on themselves and their families.

These dominant narratives about the economic, and the perceptions, prejudices and values must be successfully transgressed in order to allow more creative and holistic recognition of work to come to the fore. As well as being desirable, the suggestion to move beyond a society of full employment toward one of full engagement is also empirically grounded, being consistent with the wider story told through Time Use Surveys and Household Work Practices Surveys about the changing extent and trajectory (and informalisation) of our economies over time and space.

With capitalism more properly framed as being merely *one* of multiple future visions of work and economic organisation, we need to carefully consider what types of economic organisation best reflect the desire for freedom, happiness, security, prosperity, and the collective principles of social and spatial justice for all. Moreover, to move successfully beyond “totalising conceptions of capitalist domination” (North, 2014, 247) post-capitalist societies of full-engagement must resist any temptation to overly predict, determine and prescribe ‘the right path’ to follow. Rather, the need to embracing complex economic narratives and pathways must always resist overly determined and prescriptive blueprints in favour of more experimental and creative ones. Happily, radically rethinking the economic imaginary in ways that recognises and values the pervasive nature of non-capitalist forms brings many rich, creative and colourful tapestry of communities of solidarity and support into view (see Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016). On a communal level, there are hundreds of vibrant examples of people and communities coming together by producing and exchanging goods and services in ways that create solidarity economies; economies which offer visionary and practical forms of resistance, resilience and transformation. For example, the last thirty years or so have witnessed meaningful political-economic alternatives such as communities currencies, time banks and local exchange and trading schemes that have emerged and flourished in certain areas (see North, 2014; Michel and Hudson, 2015). Other relevant examples would include Solidarity New York City (<http://solidaritynyc.org/>); FAR Nearer (<http://www.farnearest.org/>) and the moneyless economies of The El Cambalache, located in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, (Araujo, 2016). Others have emerged through necessity as a direct response

It's becoming more and more important for many people to reconcile family life with their career.



to social and economic poverty and exclusion caused by ongoing austerity measures and crisis of capitalism. The food distribution cooperatives in Greece (Rakopoulous, 2014) is an excellent illustration of this. Beyond this, of course, expressions of solidarity and resistance to capitalism can be found in the places we may least expect them to be: in paid work in the private sector. That caring economies and other forms of mutual reciprocity and solidarity located and maintained in these spaces (of adversity) must also form a key part of the post-capitalist critique and imaginary. In short, how these alternative economies 'within' capitalist spaces gain visibility, momentum in ways that ultimately work to transform these spaces.

“THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF VIBRANT EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMING TOGETHER BY PRODUCING AND EXCHANGING GOODS AND SERVICES.”

The challenge is certainly complex and multi-layered, both across time and space, and a spectrum of personal and communal geographies. A focus on our personal agency though is extremely important; we must never underestimate the importance of acting from the milieu with which we find ourselves at the current moment. How can we (with our own skills, experiences and abilities) act in directly prefigurative ways that can positively influence and inform our own social and spatial environments, and those within it? What are our comparative strengths and limits here? How then can we invest greater amounts of time and energy in building and maintaining those 'non-capitalist' forms of work and organisation that are animated by powerful expressions of solidarity: altruism, mutual aid, and volunteerism? What barriers to participation are there that we face, and faced by those around us? How can we better learn from others in ways that empower our own communities in taking direct action to think creatively about the "crisis," its causes and potential solutions? Whatever the answers are to these, we are confident in the knowledge that - far from being a utopian future - we already embody "the (economic) alternative" in so many ways that bring positive meaning, purpose and affirmation to our (and others) everyday lives. Indeed, in many ways *not* to have these would really signal the end of the world as we know it.

Finally, another significant departure from current orthodox thinking about economics and society is to reject the idea that the "post-crisis" or "post-capitalist" world of social justice is something that can be finally attained in a world-in-waiting for the right map to set our economic sails. No, it is far more truthful and meaningful to acknowledge that our economic futures and desires that we desire are always, and will always be in a perpetual state of becoming, dynamic and unfolding. Embracing new economic imaginaries, and striving forward to embracing new ways of thinking, and engaging

our economies is/ should be - at a profound level - a continual process of performance and experimentation without a final “end” point or resting place (see Parker et al. 2014).

Conclusions

Despite a decade passing since the 2007-8 global financial and capitalist crisis, a capitulo-centric economic discourse still holds considerable influence on how we think about our economy, our society and the potential futures of work and organisation. In this way, and to reiterate, arguably *the* most significant crisis of our time is that of our imagination. In so many ways, thinking critically and differently in ways that challenge and uproot the ‘orthodox and inevitable’ economic paths we are told to conform to is to undertake a bold and potentially revolutionary act. For, as Shannon (2014, 2) observes:

“Capitalism, after all, is assembled in such a way as to make invisible its attendant social relations, to make them seem natural, and perhaps most important, to make them seem inevitable-as if there can be no alternative.”

“WE MUST NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTING FROM THE MILIEU WITH WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES AT THE CURRENT MOMENT.”

It also necessitates a difficult process of unlearning: such is the dominant and relentless propaganda that continually reduces “the economic” to capitalism, rethinking our economic imaginary is not something that will be achieved instantly. For we are all have to wrestle with, and re-assess deeply embedded economic narratives that have hitherto given value and meaning to ourselves and the world of work and organisation. The capability of thinking beyond the seemingly impossible and unleash our creative imagination (and praxis) in ways that address the challenges we face as a society are urgently needed at a time of crisis. This is not nearly as difficult, though, as it seems: despite the dogmatic refrain that we live in a capitalist society, we are - as we always were - a society rich in many economic possibilities, all of which can be drawn upon to help revitalise existing, and animate new post-capitalist pathways into being. The potential to invest and participate more fully in existing and new alternative futures is always there. As Monbiot (2017, n.p.) argues:

Participatory culture stimulates participatory politics. It creates social solidarity while proposing and implementing a vision of a better world. It generates hope where hope seemed absent. It allows people to take back control. Most importantly, it can appeal to anyone, whatever their prior affiliations might be. It begins to generate a kinder public life, built on intrinsic values. By rebuilding society from the bottom up, it will eventually force parties and governments to fall into line with what people want.

Read in this spirit, it is hoped that the central themes and arguments raised in this chapter will help provide some further incentive to unpack and problematize “the economic” in ways that will help foster new economic imaginaries and ways of being in the world. These, in turn, will inform a resurgent radical and alternative praxis that will empower individuals and communities to “escape” the capitalist economy (Fournier, 2008) and “take back” the economy (Gibson-Graham et. al. 2013). Both will be necessary if society is to move more fully toward those post-capitalist, post-crisis economic landscapes animated by the principles of ecological sustainability and social justice for all.

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