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8

Difference without dominance: social justice and the (neoliberal) economy in urban development

Colin Marx

Understandings of 'the economy' are never far from the surface in conceptualizations of socially just approaches to urban development in developing countries. In these approaches, what 'the economy' is considered to be is seldom explicitly examined (Beall 2002; Devdas 2004) and, in practice, policymakers tend to equate 'the economy' with those activities that are identifiable as capitalist and amenable to measurement (Rakodi 1995). Thus, in practice, there are currently two prevailing understandings of 'the economy' and the promises of wealth creation and assumed conditions for success that are associated with each. In the first, capitalist economic activities are the primary source of social injustices because they are exploitative in various, often brutal, ways. In the second, these same economic activities are considered to be part of a solution because they generate the resources through which social injustices can be addressed more effectively. The key point to note is not just that these two understandings coexist, but, more importantly, that 'the economy' is considered to be almost entirely coextensive with capitalist economic activities in both of them. As I will argue, the tendency for both of these opposing understandings to share a common view of 'the economy' restricts attempts to achieve socially just urban outcomes.

But, as the opening statement also hints, understandings of 'the economy' – despite their power – can simply remain subterranean and relatively unexamined. There are two reasons why 'the economy' needs to be addressed when thinking about social justice. The first is that both of the prevailing understandings outlined above disregard other representations of 'the economy' and assume that capitalist activities are always dominant (Gibson-Graham 2002). Perhaps this would not be such a problem if more diverse understandings of the economy were valued. However, as Gibson-Graham (1996, 2002) so systematically argues, the assumption that capitalist activities are always dominant undoes power in capitalist actors and processes, whilst simultaneously disempowering those economic actors considered to be marginalized or exploited by capitalism.

The second reason is because understandings of 'the economy' tend to become associated with particular parts of cities. Consequently, 'the (capitalist) economy' tends to refer to central or (industrially) productive areas of the city and informal or residential areas are parts that are represented as being of much lesser economic importance. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, these spatial referents have specific implications for social justice when the historical, inequitable spatial divisions between races coincide with understandings of where 'the economy' is located. In broad terms, 'the economy' is to be found in central and formal industrial areas of historical privilege while the vast majority of poor people live on the periphery of the city (eThekweni Municipality 2001). Progressive post-apartheid governments already find it difficult to contain the momentum of racially and spatially skewed urban development in favour of the economic 'centre'. This means that the added stridency of neoliberal perspectives on urban development only makes it more difficult to realize socially just outcomes. For these neoliberal perspectives encourage, if not compel, city governments to prioritize their 'productive' infrastructure and accessibility to global markets (Monitor Group 2000) rather than favour more redistributive and equitable forms of public investment. For the purposes of this chapter, neoliberalism is broadly understood as an attempt to reorganize social relations to the benefit of those who already hold economic and financial power (Mitchell 2002). In this sense, neoliberalism is antithetical to more immediate

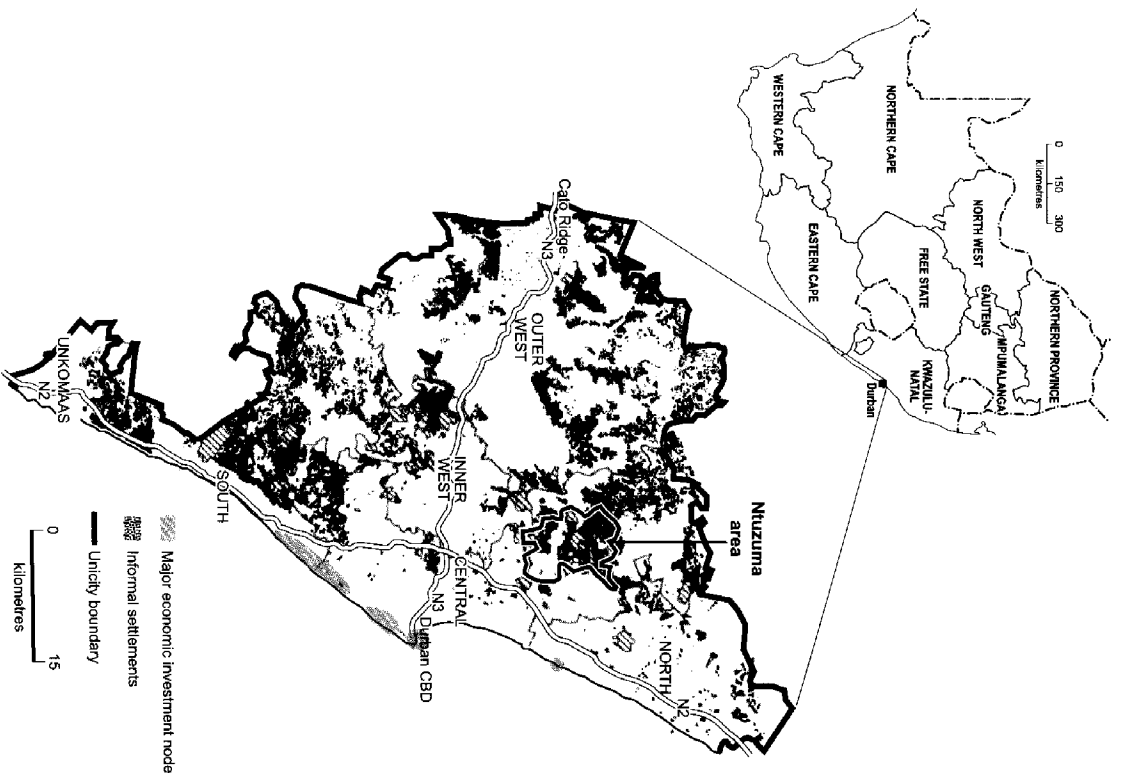


FIGURE 8.1 Map of Durban showing the Ntuzuma district

forms of social justice. But the main argument made here is that part of the process of resisting neoliberalism is not to presuppose that any particular economic activities are inherently confined to particular geographic areas of the city or are always necessarily dominant, but to be able to pay attention to where and when they are.

In relation to this argument, I draw on the example of the city of Durban, which like many other cities in the developing world has felt the keen edge of global economic adjustments (Morris et al. 2000) (Figure 8.1). Examples of parts of Durban's economy that have undergone significant change include the clothing industry (Skinner and Valodia 2003), investments in the port infrastructure (Jones 2002), and pressures on the local government to privatize public services (Desai 2002). However, there is nothing inevitable nor uniform about the effect of global economic pressures and, simultaneously, Durban's local government has set out an impressive and redistributive agenda for the pursuit of achieving social justice on a wide range of fronts (Freund 2002a). These include addressing tangible inequalities in service provision and access to housing and more intangible inequalities such as participating in the governance and development of the city (eThekweni Municipality 2001). These achievements are worth celebrating.

The aim of this chapter is to use the example of poor people's economic activities in one of the poorest areas in the north of Durban to show that these activities are part of a single diverse economy, where outcomes are more open-ended and actors are not preordained to play particular roles (Boggs and Rantisi 2003; Bathelt 2006). In this regard, I suggest that the potential to see poor people's economic activities as part of an economy lies in admitting difference in the economy *and then* resisting any temptation to ascribe any inherent quality to a particular set of activities, such as dominance to those economic activities categorized as neoliberal.¹ Although these two moments are intricately related, I insist on the need to hold them apart analytically. To avoid any misconceptions about my argument, there are clearly times when neoliberal processes dominate poor people's economic activities and these processes can be exploitative and marginalizing. Similarly, considering economic activities as interdependent is not the same as suggesting that benefits and services are distributed equally

in Durban, as the vast disparities in living standards (Nicholson 2000) and inequality (Casale and Thurlow 1999) show.

I begin by underlining the political importance of developing new economic subjectivities before presenting the complex geographies of poor people's economic activities in view of a more diverse economy. Following my insistence on keeping the analytical moments between difference and dominance apart, I then focus on some of the attributes of 'the (capitalist) economy' that are considered to account for its dominance for the purpose of decentring and dislodging the assumed inherent dominance of neoliberal economic activities. The conclusion returns to consider how thinking about difference without dominance informs strategies to resist neoliberalism.

Economic subjectivities

The city of Durban is among the top three most important economic areas in South Africa. It is a port city with a population of approximately 2.5 million people and contributes nearly 60 per cent of the province of KwaZulu-Natal's gross geographic product (EDD 2001). Despite this productivity, approximately 44 per cent of the city's population live below the poverty line (eThekweni Municipality 2002), creating the basis for significant inequalities. Commentating on the post-Apartheid period, Freund (2002b: 154) remarks that in Durban the African National Congress-dominated metropolitan government has moved effectively to try to distribute amenities more fairly throughout, but this is not, of course, the same as distributing economic activities or creating a more accessible field for accumulation available to much larger numbers of people.

It is with these 'facts' that dominant accounts of Durban's economy are constructed and within this context that I drew upon a strategy of developing new economic subjectivities in conducting the research that informs this chapter. Gibson-Graham (2004: 417) suggests that disrupting dominant accounts of the economy 'entails not only new understandings but new ways of talking, of being in the world, and thus new subjects, co-created along with a different "objectivity"'. One approach to this issue is to displace dominant discourses by

talking about other ways of being in order to yield new possibilities of subjectivity and action (Gibson-Graham 2004). Here I pay particular attention to the subjectivities of the research participants in the field site.

Relevant here is the concept of an 'authentic poor and unemployed voice' that informs approaches to poverty and economic growth, which, in turn, frames the ways in which economic marginalization and forms of adverse incorporation in the economy are represented. I suggest that the appeal to an 'authentic voice' ultimately misrepresents the relationship of poor, unemployed people to the economy by suggesting that they somehow exist beyond discourses of poverty and unemployment. For example, in relation to poverty, Meinhof and Richardson (1994: 14) observe:

poverty is not now, nor has it ever been, just a matter of material existence for poor people. It is, too, a symbolic state, a state that must be appropriately embodied in its representatives. The bodies and accoutrements of the poor must bear direct, 'true' witness to their poverty – just as much on the streets as on television or in the press.

I propose that we could equally add 'research' to this list of 'streets', 'television', and 'the press'. In this view, then, it was not surprising that on my initial entry to the Ntuzuma² area in the north of Durban (Figure 8.1), and with a small group of community leaders, the framing of my research as focusing on 'the economy' generated very specific subjectivities among both researcher and researched. These subjectivities were enacted through behaviours and responses in which all economic activities apart from full-time, permanent employment in the formal economy were erased. Since a fair proportion of people in Ntuzuma were not in full-time, permanent employment,³ economic activities in general tended to disappear from view. Fortunately, I was able to adjust the way in which the research was framed before it was introduced to the wider community and the participating households. Perceiving poverty and unemployment as multidimensional, discursive and material conditions means that specific subjectivities can be triggered in many ways. Consequently, care was taken to minimize the use of

the term 'the economy', which triggers particular subjectivities. What counts as 'the economy', what an 'economic activity' is, and how this is expressed are part of bigger discourses about 'unemployment', 'poverty' and 'development'. As Friedland and Robertson (1990: 27) remark, people's ideas, preferences and understandings 'are formed not simply in response to the opportunities that are available, but through the discourse through which people understand what choices are available, what is legitimate or socially appropriate to want, and according to the particular metric in which its costs and benefits are to be evaluated'. As such, 'the economy' and what counts as an economic activity is intricately imbued with all manner of values, behaviours and attitudes (Gudeman 1986; Kanef 2002). To minimize the ways in which this could influence participating households, the research invoked a discourse of 'valuing what people do'. To achieve this, the methodology drew on a time-use survey technique to record the activities that participants engaged in over the previous twenty-four hours. Participants then identified their most important activity during the recorded period and were asked a tailored set of in-depth questions based on, but not limited to, a prepared list. The data generated the following insights about the interconnections and interdependencies of economic activities in Durban.

Seeing difference in the economy

To begin to see difference in the economy, beyond the singular capitalist economy defined by neoliberal accounts, it is necessary to reconceptualize the relationship between (poor) economic actors and the larger economic structures and processes into which they are (voluntarily or involuntarily) drawn. The introductory section to this chapter drew attention to the problems associated with emphasizing the dominance of economic structures and processes. Equally problematic, however, at the opposite extreme is resorting to a methodological individualism that treats economic actors as atomistic units (Boggs and Rantisi 2003). Within broader social theory, an emphasis on 'practices' has been one way in which analysts have attempted to navigate between these two problematic extremes (de Certeau 1984). 'Practices', in this line of thinking, are the social sites where actors

simultaneously make sense of the broader social processes and forces that they are part of, and provide the basis for relating and connecting to other actors. A focus on 'practices' therefore makes it possible to keep both structure and agency in view without necessarily privileging either. Smith and Stenning (2006) have applied and built on this broader 'practice turn' in their work on post-socialist economies to analyse the relations and interconnections that articulate different economies. For Smith and Stenning (2006), practices also point towards the regularities of economic life that sustain livelihoods and the sociality of economic life.

While the concepts of relationality, interconnectedness and diversity that characterize this work on post-socialist economies are all themes that I draw on in this chapter, in my view the task in South African urban economies is slightly different because the policy distinctions between 'the economy' and 'non-economy' are stark and firmly entrenched. It is therefore necessary to recognize that poor people's economic activities are integral to the functioning of a single economy. In order to achieve this recognition it is necessary not just to add poor people's economic activities to the existing dominant understanding (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). The strategic aim is therefore to start with units of analysis – economic activities – that are considered common both within 'the economy' and outside of it or inconsequential to it. By showing the relationships between activities within and without 'the economy' it becomes possible to bring a different sense of a single economy into view. With a different sense of a single economy it will be possible to see more clearly when neoliberal practices are exploitative. A more precise understanding of when neoliberal practices are exploitative is fundamental to more effective forms of resistance and greater effectiveness in achieving social justice.

In this sense, Gibson-Graham's (1996) original intention in focusing on activities was to make the simple yet powerful point that non-capitalist activities that include unpaid work, reproductive work, cooperative work and so on, far outnumber activities that take place within what is considered to be 'the (capitalist) economy' – even if these are not considered to produce as much financial profit. Retaining a focus on economic activities also starts to point towards ways

in which poor people's economic activities can be made statistically comparable (Jhabvala et al. 2003).

Relational economic activities

I begin by demonstrating how economic actors in Ntuzuma understand their economic activity as being *co-constituted* by other economic activities. The understanding of an economic activity in relation to other activities suggests that economic activities are dependent on each other without necessarily being caused by each other.

It is useful to begin with the 'value chain' form of analysis that has been adopted by policymakers in Durban as a means of connecting different economic activities in Durban's municipal Informal Economy Policy (EDD 2000). The analysis of connections between economic activities serves to erase a supposed formal/informal economy 'divide' and, consequently, promotes the view of a single economy of which poor people are a part. I propose to build on eThekweni Municipality's 'value chain' analyses by showing how economic actors understand their activities in relation to other activities is contingent rather than predefined and that the economic activities that co-constitute each other do not necessarily have their wellspring in neoliberal economic impulses.

To demonstrate this contingency, I turn to the example of Mr B's investments in moulds to make concrete lintels that are used in the construction of doors and windows. For the moment, I focus on his activities of producing and selling the lintels. In recalling that he 'felt that this place will have demand for this thing [lintels]', he is acutely aware that his production of lintels is related to the activity of selling. In terms of selling lintels, he notes that 'people are getting used to it now' and making 'sense' of purchasing from him. He is 'the only one doing this' and it is clear that this *absence* of other local producers and merchants is important in customers 'selling each other' about his activities. The meaning of his productive activities is also related to other forms of exchange such as bartering 'a lintel for a window frame because you have to work hand-in-hand with people'. To draw together the points of this example, Mr B's productive activity is contingent on whether it is related to the absence of other producers, selling, or bartering. In this way, the contingent relation



FIGURE 8.2 Informal economic activities in Ntuzuma district

between different activities co-constitutes both economic activities. The difference inheres in the relationship between the activities and thus difference *binds* diverse activities together across the city such that relational proximity is more important than spatial proximity (Boggs and Rantisi 2003).

The 'value chain' approach draws attention to the complex ways in which different activities are connected, but tends to do this along one axis. However, it is not just that economic activities connect along a 'ladder' of the informal/formal spectrum. They are also always inevitably traced back to the formal centre of the 'real' (neoliberal) economy. I turn to consider a different example from Ntuzuma, which builds on the 'value chain' approach, but seeks to illustrate how activities are related in many different directions and not necessarily always back to the formal (capitalist) economy.

Mr H has been selling fruit and vegetables next to bus and minibus taxi ranks for about ten years and supports a household of six people through this activity. He recently obtained a formal stall, developed by the eThekweni Municipality at a nearby shopping centre precinct. He takes pride in listing his product range as including:

'cabbages, potatoes, tomatoes, onions, apples and oranges' according to their seasonal availability. He usually purchases new stock from the wholesale Clairwood market located in the south of the city and sometimes directly from farmers or suppliers who bring their products to the shopping centre precinct. In this way, his supply chain is conventional and is replicated by many other informal fruit and vegetable traders throughout the city (Witt 2000). The fruit and vegetable sellers face continual storage problems, have no access to refrigeration, and theft is a constant concern (Witt 2000; Cross et al. 2001). Consequently, Mr H and the other fruit and vegetable sellers rely on continually replenishing their stock. This, in turn, generates a daily need for a means of transporting the new stock. Apart from generating this need for transport, what is perhaps more interesting is that Mr H cooperates with a number of the other fruit and vegetable sellers around the shopping centre to hire a van to pick up the day's supply of stock. This cooperation extends to the collective preparation of lunch among the traders and the way in which Mr H's economic activities are entangled in relationships among the fruit and vegetable traders.

A 'vertical' value chain analysis of Mr H's economic activity draws attention to the ways in which the fruit and vegetable traders are 'trapped' in an activity that does not earn enough income to propel them into higher-earning activities (Posel 2001). Extensive analysis of the informal fruit and vegetable trade has confirmed that many fruit and vegetable sellers neither know their daily profits nor earn enough income to escape seemingly desperately overtraded market conditions (Cross et al. 2001; Skinner 2003). However, the example of Mr H's 'collective' pricing system for selling tomatoes suggests that economic activities can co-constitute other economic activities 'horizontally' as well as 'vertically'.

According to Mr H, the best time for sales is 'in the afternoons'. Mr H understands that his activity is related to the formal shops in the shopping centre. He and his fellow traders compete for sales with the formal shops. That is, the competition is not his fellow traders who are selling more or less the identical items at similar prices in the stalls immediately next to him and around the shopping centre. Not surprisingly, it is very difficult to differentiate prices when there is a

common source of supply among the traders. Therefore, the prices at which Mr H sells tomatoes are determined by their quality. Thus, the traders tend to collaborate so that the price remains more or less the same and the quantity of tomatoes at that price is adjusted according to the quality. The better the quality, the lower the quantity offered for the same purchase price. In a context where storage of a perishable item is an issue, the economic activity of selling is differentiated according to quality/freshness. It follows that widening the range of tomatoes for sale to suit different household budgets will depend on differentiating the quality of the tomatoes. The greater the differentiation, the greater the choice and more likely it will be to attract a wider range of customers and thus, in turn, support a wider range of sales.

Indeed, if the location of the fruit and vegetable sellers next to the shopping centre and bus/minibus taxi rank is taken into account, there are ways in which the selling of fruit and vegetables is more tangibly related to the public transportation 'sector' than to the formal fruit and vegetable wholesale market in the value chain. The location of the fruit and vegetable traders reflects interdependence with the spatiality of township residents' lives and their travel needs. The widespread lack of private transport means that it is difficult for individual households to buy fruit and vegetables in bulk. When the fruit and vegetable customers have to walk long distances it is neither easy nor comfortable to walk far with heavy purchases. At the same time, these customers do not want to purchase goods too early in their journey in case they spoil or are required to pay for an extra seat in the taxi for their purchases. Even if households could afford to transport their fruit and vegetables in greater quantities, they would then be faced with the requirements to store the produce securely and to minimize deterioration. This problem is overcome by purchasing the fruit and vegetables in smaller amounts. The ideal point at which to purchase vegetables is therefore where the mode of transport changes and the customer is close to their final destination. The location of the fruit and vegetable sellers shows a keen awareness of this spatiality and of people's daily rhythms across a city that remains geographically fragmented and racially segregated. The existence of the market reinforces the area as a point to which bus

and minibus taxi customers are attracted and where taxis converge and depart. In drawing attention to the perishability of tomatoes (their materiality), the location of the economic activity of selling (at the rank) and the times (in the afternoons and seasonal changes in supply). I start to anticipate other ways in which poor people's economic activities in Ntuzuma are interconnected and overlap with other activities in the city.

In sum, I have suggested that the research participants understand that their activities exist in relation to other activities and actors (see also Smith et al. in this volume). The differences between activities are contingent on the interactions between these activities and inhere in the perceived relationship rather than in an understanding of the activities as independent and preformed. It follows that understandings of economic activities are diverse and cannot be bounded. Difference, in this sense, binds activities together in networks of interdependence that do not necessarily have their focus in the formal (capitalist) economic register. This yields a view of Durban's economy where activities, even very small ones such as those in Ntuzuma, are a 'constitutive power' of the economy (Community Economics Collective 2001). Burt (1995) argues that new economic activities are generated when agents can get between overlapping networks of activities. Following this line of thinking it is possible to hypothesize that the greater the diversity of economic activities in Durban, the greater the possibility of economic actors to generate new economic activities.

Overlaps and interconnectedness

All the economic actors who participated in the research draw attention to at least three different elements of their economic activities. They talk about the *material* qualities or physical attributes of the objects they produce or work with. Examples include the weight of concrete lintels, making them difficult to steal; the speed of assembling items such as sewing church uniforms; the perishability/durability of commodities; and the tools and equipment needed to dig trenches. They also remark upon the *spatial* distance they have to walk/travel to obtain inputs for their activities, such as liquid petroleum gas, the places and boundaries of their operations both

inside the neighbourhood and further away in the centre of the city or rural towns, the location of suppliers typically in the central city. Finally, they relate their activities to the *times* of the day, week or month, with their durations, frequencies, suspensions or disruptions. Examples include the best times to sell, how the rhythms of the school day and year affected activities, and how activities fluctuated according to the seasons and annual cycles within the year.

The ways in which economic activities have a materiality, spatiality and temporality, and how these aspects overlap and interconnect, demonstrate another way that poor people's economic activities are part of the city and a single diverse economy. I turn to the example of Ms J's production and sales of *iziqeda* (see lollies).⁵ As a number of scholars have pointed out, economic activities such as Ms J's provide a convenient service in poor areas due to their accessible location in the immediate neighbourhood (Cross 2000; Markiewicz English et al. 2000). However, the production and sale of *iziqeda* is related to more than spatial proximity to a market. The physical properties of the *iziqeda* (they must be frozen) are an important part of this convenience that contributes to their production and sales. The quick freezing property of the flavoured mixture minimizes the amount of electricity required and the availability of free municipally supplied water means that the barriers to entry for this type of economic activity are low. Since the *iziqeda* must be frozen (and remain frozen) they must generally be distributed or sold from a house or structure with affordable electricity and a freezer. In instances where Ms J packs her *iziqeda* into a cooler box and sells at the local bus stop or football match, she must be sure of relatively quick sales in a big enough market on a hot enough day. Equally, the long travel times in the searing temperatures of Durban's summer means that it is very difficult for people to purchase these items from 'formal'/industrial sources of ice lollies and transport them home for their children. Industrial suppliers appear unwilling to invest in a distribution system in peripheral township areas, possibly because of a general fear of crime (Harrison et al. 1997). The spatial distance and widespread lack of private transport means that industrially produced ice lollies purchased in a formal shop are unavailable in Ntuzuma. Even if people could transport *iziqeda* home, they are likely to face a storage

and/or refrigeration problem. Home-made production is similarly constrained by the lack of refrigeration. This means that children buy *iziqeda* on demand. The temporality of *iziqeda* production and sales extends beyond the time it takes to make the items or the seasonal changes in sales volumes.

The sale of *iziqeda* relies on the amount of cash circulating through the activities that make up Durban's economy (Cross et al. 2001). This is evident as Ms J's sales peak cyclically at the end of the month when workers in the formal economy are paid. Nevertheless, other factors beyond a focus on the amount of cash circulating also influence her activities. These include the school calendar that determines the availability of her primary market of schoolchildren. Thus the seasons and school calendar cycles overlap and intersect in different ways to produce peaks and troughs of sales in relation to the monthly flows of cash generated in 'the economy'. In this case, Ms J's activities are intertwined with, and follow, the infrastructural networks of roads, electricity and energy, water and sanitation. This underscores Amis's (2004) observation that it is much easier for urban governments to destroy livelihoods through the non-provision of infrastructure than create employment.

The material, spatial and temporal aspects of Ms J's economic activity are neither reducible to each other nor fixed. This suggests that both her economic activities and others in Durban result from the combination of these aspects that are at times uneven, fleeting, enduring or even contradictory. The overlaps and interconnections emerge as the activities share spaces, infrastructures, seasons, cycles, daily rhythms and enable Ms J to engage in economic activity. Equally, however, these same issues prevented home-made and industrial production from occurring in Ntuzuma. This raises a more general issue about how the material, spatial and temporal aspects of activities might displace, supplant, isolate or insulate particular economic activities from others, even though they overlap or are interconnected, and how the lack of infrastructure enables certain economic activities (Benjamin 2000).

It follows from the notions of overlap and interconnectedness that economic activities can be *multiply* related to other activities and their associated materialities, spatialities and temporalities (Simone 2004).

Attentiveness to how these different aspects relate and combine arguably enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of economic activities (Callon 1998; Miller 2002). This in turn hints at the complexity of how economic activities are interrelated but also provides a different basis for starting to think about how the 'exploitative' dynamics of neoliberalism might be produced and 'transmitted' or sustained across the city.

Networks of interdependencies

When considering Mr B producing lintels, earlier in the chapter, I deliberately restricted attention to a singular relationship with other economic activities, even though the example threatened to overflow the limits I was imposing. I did this to draw attention to the way that the understanding of relational difference binds economic activities together. Now I more fully represent the way in which the research participants understand their economic activities as being multiply related to other economic activities. Indeed, it is difficult to think of an example of the understanding of an economic activity only being related to one other economic activity. Drawing on a different example this time, of Ms M's activities of selling hats, scarves and socks, I illustrate how economic activities are multiply related to other activities and how this is important for allowing Ms M to elaborate many different stories within the city and beyond. The implication of activities being multiply related is that such an understanding proliferates the possibilities for overlaps, interconnectedness and interdependencies of activities that make diverse economic activities possible in the first instance.

Ms M started selling hats and socks in the absence of similar activities, when she did not observe anyone else selling these items in Ntuzuma. Her economic activity of selling hats, handkerchiefs, scarves, umbrellas and socks is related to her part-time employment as a domestic worker (two days per week). In an environment where people spend a great deal of time outdoors (walking or waiting for public transport) sometimes on unmade roads, hats that offer 'protection from the sun and the cold, and sometimes go with a style', and socks, which wear out quickly, have a ready market. Small items such as socks are also subdivisible from the bulk packs in which they are

found in shops and can therefore be offered on a more affordable and accessible basis to people as the seller goes door to door. The affordability and accessibility are more likely to ensure a cashflow for the seller (Cross et al. 2001). She notes, 'people don't have money in the middle of the month, so they pay me at month end.' Ms M knows that credit and convenience are important aspects that co-constitute her activity and will 'let people buy on credit' if it will help her make a sale. Selling these items from door to door has a specific temporality because the best time for sales is the 'afternoons and weekends' when people are more likely to be at home. Her ability to offer credit and convenience; however, is restricted to 'around Ntuzuma and [adjacent] B-Section' where it is easy to locate customers in networks and follow up for payment. She is not restricted by previous sales because the same person 'might like to buy for someone else, or want another colour'. She started selling socks and so on from door to door with a capital of R100⁶ and in a good month has a turnover of 'between R350 and R400'. This contributes nearly half of an overall monthly household income of between R800 and R1,200. However, she prefers domestic work and is always seeking to secure additional work of this type. For this reason her activity of selling hats and socks and her domestic work are simultaneously related to her acknowledged *inability* to engage in another economic activity selling perishable commodities such as 'vegetables [which] can get rotten'.

It follows from this view that economic activities are part of networks of interdependencies with other economic activities, and their materialities, spatialities and temporalities. Thus, activities can simultaneously have multiple meanings and, consequently, can overlap. Given that this interdependence is co-constituted it is difficult to bound the processes of interaction. Nonetheless, the process of establishing the identity of economic activities is not infinitely boundless. Although in theory the establishment of relationships between activities could proliferate endlessly, the meaning of economic activities is stabilized to make categorizations possible. Understandings of activities are restricted, confined, channelled and ranked in many ways (Gudeman 1986; Graeber 2009). One of the ways that understandings of economic activities are contained is in the categories of production, consumption, investment, services and

exchange/selling. Another is through the generation and maintenance of different economic registers of value. The research participants in Ntuzuma have sensitivity to these different categories and registers and operate within and across the multiple understandings that can be generated. They realize the importance of making sense of difference and sustaining difference. Usually these registers are ranked in prestige (Graeber 2005). It appears that it is just as important to engage in activities that move up the hierarchy as it is to secure a material output. The hierarchies of prestige vary in space and time but commonly circulate around kin, religion, care, culture or 'the market'. The research participants choose when to activate them, rank them in different ways and convert activities up the rankings according to different social and personal criteria. They do not try to flatten the differences into a single economic register as ostensibly sought by neoliberalism but, instead, provide a basis for new forms of difference to emerge. The difference is critical to being able to have multiple meanings, elaborate different stories and generate new activities and bring to mind the 'interlocking potential' of diverse activities (Simone 2005).

Having generated a view of Durban's economy that consists of proliferating relationships binding activities together through networks of interdependencies, with entanglements of interconnections and overlaps, the task remains to ensure that 'the economy' does not remain locked within the neoliberal capitalist aspect of this differentiated spatial economy that is starting to come into view.

Dislodging and decentring the perceived location of generative economic activities

Before poor people's economic activities can be written into a broader understanding of a single economy, it is necessary to dislodge and decentre the activities that are assumed to be generative and productive from a singular capitalist economic register and specific (confined) central locations within Durban. For the purposes of the argument, I assume that these generative and productive activities can be grouped together under the concept of economic growth. This has the advantage of closely matching the rhetorical and political use of

the concept, but does not do justice to the complexities of processes associated with economic growth. I aim to show that activities such as innovation and productivity that conceptually underpin economic growth can potentially occur anywhere within the networks of interdependencies, overlaps and interconnections in Durban.

I undertake the task of dislodging and decentring growth from the spatial and conceptual confines of a capitalist aspect of Durban's economy in two progressive steps. The first step works from the existing and dominant understandings of economic growth and sets out the means of disrupting these understandings. The second step looks to the role of the relations and interconnections among different activities and how these relate to innovation and productivity and in so doing start to shift our understanding of the basis of economic growth.

Unsettling economic growth

It is worth recalling that neoliberal understandings of 'the economy' focus on the different ways in which the levels and combinations of capital, labour and technology can increase productivity and innovation. The understandings, in turn, are based on a conceptualization of activities that are generative, propulsive and/or innovative, and, importantly, confined within particular physical spaces and 'spaces' of homogenous rationalities or logics. However, I have suggested ways in which diverse economic activities are interdependent and interconnected. Economic activities throughout the city (and beyond) are bound together by (discontinuous) differences and the diverse interconnections that arise through the sharing of infrastructures and overlaps of the material, spatial and temporal aspects of economic activities. Therefore, there is an argument to be made that all economic activities are less pure and singular than they are made out to be and cannot be captured through a binary understanding of the economy as capitalist/non-capitalist.

Since it is virtually impossible to limit or determine the point at which the interdependencies, interconnections and overlaps of economic activities end – either physically or in terms of meaning – it is possible to suggest that the activities associated with economic growth are less bounded, internally coherent and independent than

they are represented as being in dominant accounts of economic growth. If different economic activities are in fact related, then this suggests that it is certain configurations of activities which are responsible for economic growth and it is more difficult to identify a single (neoliberal) activity as the locus of economic growth with any certainty or precision. It is within configurations of activities, rather than through the isolation of single activities, that it would be possible to identify propulsive or generative activities, for example.

This is an important first step in dislodging and decentring economic growth from its perceived current location in particular formal, well-developed spaces of the city and within the rationality of the capitalist economic register. The limitation of this view is that it suffers from what Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003) describe as an 'added-on approach'. Thus, while the approach suggests ways that diverse economic activities are endlessly linked, the linkages remain conceived within the existing dominant systems of representing and measuring economic growth. As a result poor people's economic activities remain marginalized because they are perceived as too small, fragmented, lacking in equipment, credit and so on to be measured, and hence to contribute to economic growth that is considered to emerge only from neoliberal aspects of the economy (Monior Group 2000). It is necessary to take a further step.

Reconceptualizing innovation and productivity

A concept/phenomenon such as neoliberal economic growth can be reconceptualized in many ways. Here I look to the relations and interconnections of economic activities and how they make economic growth 'visible'. To arrive at a view of the economy and economic growth which is based on a new understanding of productivity requires stripping away the concepts that buttress the dominant view.

I begin by distinguishing between profitability and productivity to offer possibilities for measuring economic growth beyond a capitalist register of profitability. I continue by focusing on the dominant argument that economic growth is spatially confined and bound by a homogeneous rationality/logic. It is the view of a bounded space of economic growth that this dominant argument marshals that offers

the possibility of reconceptualizing innovation and productivity, and, ultimately, the means by which poor people's economic activities can be considered as contributing to economic growth. By not taking this bounded view of space for granted, it emerges that economic growth (as dominantly conceived) has as much to do with the extra- or non-economic power to fix, immobilize, isolate, and lock in advantage across spaces in the city, as it does with innovation and productivity.

One way in which to reconceptualize economic growth is to widen the registers in which economic growth is measured by broadening the current singular focus on 'profitability'. Castells and Portes (1989) observe that poor people's economic activities in informal economic networks have contradictory effects on the growth of capital, labour and productivity. Thus, they introduce doubt to the view that poor people's economic activities cannot be profitable and, hence, contribute to economic growth. They point out that, on the one hand, the productivity of poor people's labour may be lower because the production technologies they utilize are less advanced, and it is suggested that poor people's economic activities are over-represented in consumer-type services where gains in growth tend to be lower. On the other hand, poor people's productivity of capital may be higher because their overheads and labour costs are lower (Castells and Portes 1989). Consequently, to dismiss poor people's economic activities *tout court* appears unwise. However, Massey (1996) takes the argument a step further and makes the point more clearly – although productivity and profitability are related, they are not the same.

In neoliberal accounts of the economy, profitability is generally regarded as an 'engine of growth'. Capitalism as arguably one of the most efficient means of generating profit has therefore come to be seen as the most effective way of ensuring increases in productivity. Massey (1996) notes that there is not an automatic link between profitability and productivity. Some activities may be profitable but not productive (e.g. the armaments industry), some activities may be productive but not profitable (e.g. public transportation systems), and some activities may be indirectly productive and not linked to profitability at all (e.g. unpaid domestic household reproductive labour). The implication is that the conflation of the concept of

productivity with the concept of profitability contains discussions about productivity within the (capitalist) aspect of the economy equated with generating profits. If the concept of productivity is at the heart of economic growth, then it is important to distinguish it from profitability to allow for the growth contribution of diverse economic activities.

I now turn to consider the view that economic growth occurs in bounded spaces in the city and within particular 'spheres of (capitalist) rationality'. Against this dominant view, I hold up the analysis developed in this chapter. In particular, if economic activities, such as those described in Nhuzuma, have multiple meanings that emerge from their interconnections and relations with other activities, it follows that they have no inherent meaning or characteristics. That an economic activity can be 'seen' or 'said' to contribute to economic growth is dependent on its location in the networks of interdependencies, interconnections and overlaps rather than its physical location. For example, the same activity (such as Mr B's manufacturing of lintels in Nhuzuma) in a different network of economic relationships (such as the capitalist, centrally located register) would conventionally be considered to be contributing to Durban's economic growth.

That said, it is the neoliberal power to fix, immobilize, isolate and lock in economic activities across the spaces of the city and to 'see' these activities as contributing to economic growth that determines the economic growth of the city. It is the spatiality of this power that reveals the extra- or non-economic power that is brought to bear to immobilize, fix, networks of interdependencies and interconnections rather than the ability to be innovative (Mitchell 2002; Zein-Elabdin 2004). The involvement of extra- or non-economic power in conventional analyses of the economy alerts us to the way in which the neoliberal concept of economic growth is reductionist. Economic growth is what *and where* it is measured to be. 'What' and 'where' economic growth is considered to be are in turn a function of the power within networks to make social phenomena 'visible' and valued (Powell, 1990; de Boeck and Plissart 2004; Simone 2004).

Thus, and alternatively, for an economic activity to be considered as productive or innovative does not only have to do with its profitability/output or location in particular spaces in the city or

'spheres of economic rationality'. Instead, it also depends on its location in overlapping, interdependent and interconnected networks. In this new view, economic growth is based on innovation, which involves *generating multiple economic meanings*, sharing infrastructures *in new and more intensive ways*, creating *generative overlaps*, all alongside using equipment and assets more productively, intensively and sustainably.

To conclude, I return briefly to Nhuzuma to illustrate this view of productivity and innovation. In terms of generating new meanings in relation to existing economic activities, it is possible to think of Ms H's involvement in the valuation of dwellings in Nhuzuma as diversifying the aspects of the economy in which the dwelling could be perceived as an asset and creating the basis for new interconnections with financial institutions. Ms S's production of church uniforms, using sewing machines donated by a Chinese charity to her associational group, to diverse customers within and beyond the city, demonstrates the initiation of new interconnections. There are a number of examples of using infrastructures more intensively. The obvious examples include the production of *iziqeda* and lintels, which both depend on the (limited) municipally supplied free water. However, another example could be the informal fruit and vegetable sellers, who until recently used the roadside to conduct their activities, or the informal traders selling small snacks to schoolchildren during their breaks on the school grounds.

However, there is a crucial distinction to be made between suggesting that economic activities are overlapping, interconnected and interdependent and the ways in which the results of these relationships distribute resources and assets. Not all overlaps or interconnections work to allocate resources, commodities and people in the same way. This underscores an earlier point in relation to the neoliberal economic processes, that they are not always dominant but that it is important to be attentive to the times and places where they are. The ability to convert innovative economic activities into a propulsive force appears to have much to do with existing inequalities in the distribution of resources as well as the extra- or non-economic power to fix spatially the reach of particular activities. As Friedland and Robertson (1990: 12) comment, 'if the determinants of state policies that shape costs and profitability, investment and growth, lie outside

of the marketplace, then analyses that bracket off the market are likely to be mis-specified.

Not all economic activities can be part of growth in the same way, simultaneously. By definition, the activities that are associated with economic growth must be randomly and unevenly distributed. This is a key feature of neoliberal representations of the economy. But, unlike these neoliberal models, the generative activities that can be considered to result in growth are no longer found solely in the capitalist aspect of the economy. Now, since the generative activities that cause growth are contingent rather than predetermined (Massey 1996, Allen et al. 1998) or, to use Gibson-Graham's (1996) terminology, overdetermined, the impetus for economic growth (and different forms of economic growth) could be located anywhere in a differentiated spatial economy. A similar point can be made for activities that transmit or sustain processes of growth. The implication of this view is that in some cases an activity could generate/transmit/sustain a growth dynamic because of the actualization of certain qualities, and in some cases the location of the activity in a network could be more important in terms of the growth dynamic. If a differentiation between diverse economic activities cannot be made within hegemonic accounts of the economy, it is necessary to direct the attention to the extra-economic power that is brought to bear on defining what is 'seen' as part of economic growth.

Conclusion

Attention to the enactment and embodiment of economic activities across different economic spaces requires attending to how activities are understood in terms of their relationships with other activities (Bathelt 2006). It becomes possible to see dominance or separation or the interdependence between activities, not because of any inherent quality attached to a particular aspect of an economy, but because of the effect of the relationships themselves. These effects are likely to have different geographies, temporalities, and will affect different people in different ways (Allen et al. 1998).

The proliferation of interconnections and interdependencies between poor people's economic activities in one of the poorest

parts of the city and other economic activities start to challenge the view that the 'the economy' consists only of what are considered to be capitalist activities and that the activities that are associated with productivity and innovation are only to be found in the central parts of the city. This provides the basis upon which to begin resisting the neoliberal arguments that new investments should primarily reinforce existing investments (and economic privilege) rather than engage more diversely in redistributive public investment.

The multiplicity of the interconnections and interdependencies also point to far more diverse ways that (poor) people might make their way through economic life despite the strictures and exploitative pressures of neoliberal attempts to reorganize social relations. The recognition of this diversity requires more imaginative responses from progressive local government officials intent on achieving more socially just outcomes. Policy responses need go beyond, for example, eThekweni Municipality's small-business training programmes and micro-credit schemes that are assumed to equip marginalized people to engage with the capitalist economy in the centre of the city. Instead, support needs to be provided to poor people's economic networks and their abilities to pursue economic activities that have multiple meanings through the provision of productive and generative infrastructure that can create new interconnections and interdependencies between economic actors.

The corollary of the existence of the multiple and diverse interconnections and interdependencies between poor people's economic activities and other economic activities is that there are more diverse ways in which neoliberal attempts to extend and create new forms of exploitation can be 'transmitted' in cities. This aspect has not been explored in the chapter but is critically important to consider, because I am far from claiming that capitalism is never or even rarely dominant in a diverse economy. In this respect, what the analysis in this chapter has achieved is recognition that the relationships between poor people's economic activities and neoliberal activities are more complex than the view suggested by an understanding that neoliberalism is always dominant.

Notes

1. It is important to resist ascribing any inherent, unchanging qualities to any part of urban economies. For example, it is equally important to avoid mythologizing any qualities of an informal economy (Samers 2001).
2. Ntuzuma is a large area in the north of the city that has many smaller neighbourhoods. The research was conducted in one of the smaller neighbourhoods, but for purposes of confidentiality I refer only to the broader area.
3. The demographic profile of the participants and their households were located firmly in the grid of probabilities that increase the chances of being considered among the most burdened by a neoliberal economy in South Africa. The participants live in a peripheral location, they are mostly women, not in full-time and permanent employment, and the household heads have low education levels, low household incomes and in terms of South Africa's racial categories, are Black.
4. eThekweni Municipality is the name of the local government that covers the city of Durban and broader metropolitan area.
5. *Izigqeda* is the isiZulu word for ice lollies in small, clear plastic bags (singular, *sigqeda*).
6. At the time of research US\$1 was equal to R6.33.
7. Ms S takes orders for church uniforms at the annual Easter celebration of her church when large numbers from all over the province congregate at Maphumulo. The orders are paid for up-front and the uniforms delivered the following Easter.

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