

8 Writing economic theory *anOther way*

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On questions

Economics as a discipline resists definition.¹ Such indeterminacy regarding the exact nature of practice probably lent credence to the statement “economics is what economists do.”² There are numerous different ways of ‘doing’ economics resting on different conceptualizations of the phenomena worth investigation and the attributes of the agents involved. The practice followed by the bulk of the discipline is conventionally termed mainstream economics.³ Mainstream economics encompasses pure general equilibrium theory, neoclassical economics, new classical economics and game theory (Dow 1995: 717–19). Implicit in these different strands is mathematical formalism and determinism. It is important to note that while there have been many histories of economics, and many ways of writing those histories, there are not enough histories of contemporary mainstream economics around.⁴

One reason for the lack of enough work tracing the consolidation of mainstream economics, especially after the transition from Political Economy to Economics (Mirowski 1989, Perelman 1996: 14–16), may have

- 1 However, this is not to say that economics has not been defined. It has had many avatars from the study of material prosperity to the study of choice under scarcity.
- 2 This remark is widely attributed to Viner. See Reder (1999: 3) – although he footnotes that there is no particular citation that can be offered for this quote.
- 3 Although there are folk narratives about the dissenting nature of economists (“in a room with six economists, there are seven opinions”), it should come as no surprise to those on the margins of the discipline that there is actually significant agreement among the mainstream (for instance, see Perelman 1996: 22–9).
- 4 Indeed, we need to ask the question of the relations between economics as a geohistorically situated discipline and the widespread belief in an ‘economic logic’ which appears to be universal. How was it that the “economic” became universal and disciplined so that to defy the ‘economic logic’ you had to be a child, a lunatic or a primitive non-European? How do we justify the triumphalist convictions of science (and social science) which lead one to think that “history happened in order to produce my kind” (as Spivak so aptly put it when writing “Other things are never equal”, 2000: 43).

to do with its 'scientific' status. After all, it is ideologies that are historically situated, not universal methods. It is only to be expected that a dominant scientific discourse wishes its own history away and strives to be seen as a positivist, scientific (formalized and mathematical) rational, obvious method untainted by ideology and unlocated in its historical moment.⁵ The economic 'subject' (subject of economic thought) of this unlocated analysis is a self-transparent unembodied and unembedded amoral utility maximizer propped up by Cartesian dualisms and interested narratives of Enlightenment reason. The 'method' of accessing valid disciplinary (and disciplined) economic narratives of this subject is characterized by methodological individualism, individual rationality, mathematical formalism, heroic role of assumptions in a theory, deductive nomological explanation, operation of an extremum principle and so on (see Addleson 1995, Arrow 1994, Chick 1998, Dow 1998, Kurien 1996, Schoemaker 1991, Weintraub 1998).

The closing decades of the twentieth century saw a fault-line appear across numerous academic (hyper-specialized, compartmentalized and professionalized) disciplines due to hermeneutically inspired critical interventions from feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial theory.⁶ The effect of these interventions has been to pull apart the ground from under positivist anchors in the certainty of unmediated access to knowledge of an external reality. In economics, this has added to critiques of the mainstream for its exclusion of gender, race, class, environmental, and ethical issues. However, critiques of economics as a 'social science' have largely functioned within the theoretical confines set by modernism,⁷ and therefore have not come to terms with the need for writing economics in radically different ways. This chapter excavates the modernism of mainstream thinking by drawing on aspects of the postcolonial critique. I draw attention to the possibility of letting the central themes and concerns of postcolonial thought interpellate the discourse of economics, especially to highlight the connection between conceptualizations of what we mean by 'economic theory' and how it draws nourishment from, and is linked to, modernism in all its hues.

5 As an aside, be invited to think in the manner of Nietzsche, "only that which has never had a history can be 'defined'" (see Dillon 2000: 1).

6 See Bleicher (1980) for a comprehensive account of hermeneutics (defined loosely as "the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning"). Broadly, this is a strand of thought concerned with meaning and interpretation of human expression in its linguisticity. This is important because of the acknowledgment that the linguisticity of human expression carries meaning which needs to be interpreted via the subjectivity of the knower. This necessarily brings into the equation of knowledge, the consideration of subjectivity as "lived experience" drawing upon "historical consciousness."

7 For instance, influential and persuasive critiques of economics from the Critical Realist perspective (see Lawson 1997, Fleetwood 1998) focus on the errors of mainstream method and not enough on its ideological status as a political practice (see Kaul 2002).

The next section looks at how theorization works in economics, and the following sections discuss the questions raised by admitting the possibility of 'difference' which cannot be dealt with as an addendum. The final section concludes by bringing us back to the implicit issue raised by the title of the introduction, what are the questions that we would be asking if we acknowledged a contested Othering of discourses on the 'economy' and about the 'economic' which currently function as scientific facts which are devoid of history and legitimated by access through 'valid' methods? How would changing the questions we pose change our writing of economics?

Shall I theorize thee?

In March 1999, the *Journal of Economic Literature* published an article titled "The Young Person's Guide to Writing Economic Theory" (Thomson 1999). The article, intended especially for young economists, was to provide them with "recommendations for writing theory" (157). The reason I choose to point out this article is the extremely good illustration it provides of what economists mean by 'theory' and how it should be 'done.' It is also significant that the article appears in a key journal which serves as a place for defining what economics literature is all about. In addition, the mock humorous tone of the article contains a nudge and wink at the peculiarities of writing economics. It aims to allay anxieties for those who haven't figured out how to get 'inside' this high discourse, but in the process, it also exposes the numerous implicit value judgments that guide theorizing.

What does the guide tell us? The "essay is mainly concerned in its details with *formal models*. It does not cover the writing up of *empirical work*" (157, emphases added). In a good piece of work done by a young economist, the reader "should be able to *easily spot* the main results, figure out most of the *notation* and *locate* the crucial *definitions* needed to understand the statement of each *theorem*" (158, emphases added). Here, economic theory is seen as the ability to create and present a mathematical model. It is a serious business to train and expect such theorization as valid economics, as social science. When advising young theorists to "choose notation that is easily recognizable" (160), Thomson gives the following example,

The best notation is notation that can be guessed. When you see a man walking down the street with a baguette under his arm and a beret on his head, you do not need to be told he is a Frenchman. *You know he is*. You can *immediately and legitimately* invest him with all the attributes of Frenchness, and this greatly facilitates the way you think and talk about him. You can guess his children's names – Renée or Edmond – and chuckle at his supposed admiration for Jerry Lewis.

(Thomson 1999: 160, emphases added)

Here, despite the self-ironic chuckle implied in the example, the point is a wink and a nod aimed at those who laugh precisely because they are 'in' on the discourse, and have accepted the discourse's parameters. The parameter contained in the joke is that of essentialism. Contained in the jokes about the choice of notation, abbreviations, assumptions, and the naming of agents, is, effectively, the fairly serious matter of theorization as a process that begins with formalization, moves on to universalization, and when confronted with difference, resorts to stereotyping.

Thus we find that the concerns of method are translated into the question of what the ratio of mathematics to English should be in the writing of proofs, namely

The optimal ratio of mathematics to English in a proof varies from reader to reader.... A proof written entirely in English is often not precise enough and is too long; a proof written entirely in mathematics is impossible to understand, unless you are a digital computer of course. Modern estimation techniques have shown that the optimal ratio of mathematics to English in a proof lies in the interval (52%, 63.5%).

(Thomson 1999: 170, emphasis in original)

This is followed by an example of a proof that is "just right:"

Proof: This follows from the inclusion $\varphi \subseteq P$, Part (i) Proposition 1, and Lemma 1 applied to φ . QED.

(Thomson 1999: 171).

The writing of economic theory on these terms is not so much a theorizing of the 'economic' in its content and evaluations, but rather a second order a priori formalized exercise where the method serves as a grid onto which any content can be mapped. Following on from this, the comprehension of subjectivity implied by such analysis is notoriously impoverished. The 'subject' of analysis is a 'universal' figure whose identity is not a function of its situatedness. An example of the extent to which naming is seen as being unrelated to the content of theorization is as follows:

Choose the sex of your agents once and for all. Flip a coin. If it is a boy, rejoice! If it is a girl, rejoice! And don't subject them to sex change operations from paragraph to paragraph.... Two-person games are great for sexual equality. Make one player male and the other female... . It will also save you from the awkward 'he or she,' 'him or her,' 'his or her!' Alternatively, you may be able to refer to your agents in the plural, or choose one of them to be a firm, and refer to it as 'it.'

(Thomson 1999: 180–1)

Like everything else, identity is also simply an uncomplicated choice. Regardless of the scenario one is 'theorizing,' the agents remain abstract neutral essences who can be invested with any kind of identity. So that, we have this instruction: "Call your *generic* individual i , his [sic] preference relation R_i , his utility function u_i , and his endowment vector ω_i . The production set is Y . Prices are p , quantities q " (160–1, emphases added). The underlying faith in the usefulness of axiomatization is directly correlated with a desire for objective, general, and pure universal knowledge in symbolic terms, which can be manipulated to handle particular contextual complications.

The writing of economic theory is seen as the construction of formal models, which are legitimate because they are seen as attempts to generate knowledge of the general and universal kind which is unembodied and unembedded in any specific context. The appeal to the signifier 'science' performs the important function of stabilizing the writing of such economic theory.

The 'economic' in Thomson's guide is an absence, what matters is the narrow method. Thomson is not unique in this interpretation of what we mean by economic theory, for the mainstream profession stands by him. It is a science (never mind all the numerous arguments to the contrary) like physics, like mathematics (Mirowski 1989, 1991). But, what are the questions? (Mirowski 1994, Robinson 1977: 1318–39). Why should applied mathematics be called social science when even the application proceeds in an imaginary "apple-pie universe" (Wootton 1938, a lament for economics that's not dated yet).

This focus on formalization as the core of economic theory leaves unchallenged the underlying issues of universalism and modernist stereotype that form the operational basis of mainstream economic method. And it is not only formalism which requires that identity be a matter of universal essences. The particularities of inalienably situated historical contexts within which the 'economic' is experienced are simplified into the general and universal denominations. For instance, McCloskey as a path-breaking theorist who is strongly associated with recognizing the limits of formalism and arguing for an acknowledgement of the way in which economics as a discipline is discursively constructed, is at the same time unwilling to contest the discourse of growth as an economic phenomenon unencumbered by questions of history, agency, and identity. She argues (McCloskey 2000: 33) that "the problems of poor countries have little to do with the experience of imperialism," saying,

It seems strange to go on blaming imperialism for the woes of a Third World whose growth rate has accelerated steadily in the past fifty years. India, the most confidently anti-imperialist and anticapitalist former colony, has had the lowest growth rate in Asia – mainly, I would say, not because it was once Victoria's jewel, but because it

has followed Harold Laski's policies of keeping the market out . . . You could only recently buy American breakfast cereal in India. The former colonies that have embraced capitalism – [...] – have done well. You can buy anything in Hong Kong. Even parts of Africa seem to be emerging from their self-inflicted wounds since independence. . . . (t)he impact of imperialism on the imperial powers has been trivial . . . [postcolonialists] seem to take the very sensible point of the subaltern school of historians that the colonial experience was identity-making for the colonized and turn it into an all-purpose influence on the colonizers. I know, I know: the Other, the Orient and so forth.

(*ibid.*)

Despite her recognition of discursive construction, McCloskey repeatedly notes that she is a historian, someone messy, working with reality. And, she slips into making a particular comprehension of the empirical into 'the' empirical – giving a status of Fact to that (i.e., to growth) which is theoretically constituted as a 'fact.'

How did we get to this place where we can unquestioningly designate, for everyone to understand, the 'Third World' and the 'poor nations?' As M. Shapiro writes, we need to practice insurrectional textuality, "to use a particular grammar that helps to historicize phenomena that are ordinarily accepted as unproblematic. . . . shift from atemporal noun like criminal to one conveying temporality like 'criminalization'" (Shapiro 1989a: 71). For, "to textualize a domain of analysis is to recognize that 'any reality' is mediated by a mode of representation and that representations are not a description of a world of facticity" (1989b: 13–14). The nations are impoverished and were colonized rather than poor former colonies – if only they would 'grow!'. The capitalizing of modernity in the history of colonization continues under the guise of globalization (or development) forcing people of 'become' a part of 'civilization' (see Escobar 1995).

Growth is not a neutral phenomenon. Leaving aside the thorny issues of trade, income distribution and the environment, the process of growth has often meant the imposition of "European ideas, values and institutions – largely wrecked [these] cultural systems, undermining [African] ways of life and subsistence" (Pfaff 2001). The Subaltern school of historiography (see Guha 1998) and the subsequent richly diverse post-colonial work (see Bhabha 1994, Prakash 1994) have opened up the difficult-to-confront possibility that subsuming meta-narratives may not be the stuff history ought to be made of – especially colonial history so imbricated with power and resistance, hegemony and counter-hegemony – and that the repression of modernism's barbarities plays a crucial role in maintaining the psychic balance of the oppressor.

Thus we see that beneath the formalism and universalism of mainstream economic theorizing is a project whose pretensions to scientism rests on a reconstitution of modernist imaginations of history as

fact. Theories of the economic need to be written in a nonuniversal, contextualized way that does not have as its referent the same individual, desirable in its specificity, but universalized in its domain, inhabiting a teleological narrative of emancipation. The terrain from Thomson's method to McCloskey's modernist narrative of history illustrates not simply that there are other ways of writing economic theory but that we need to write economic theory an*Other* way.

"...[A]nd is not exactly stateable in figures"⁸

What are the meta-narratives, gaps, elisions, and fissures through which economics constructs its universal and teleological narrative? Here, I examine that which is not stateable within the language of modernist mainstream economics. This requires the asking of questions relating to the very categories of 'economy' and the 'economic' as constructed by economics. In understanding these categories, the focus on enumerability leads one to question the conflation of the enumerable with the scientific. So that the links between scientism and mathematization in economics cannot be undone simply by historicizing economics in isolation as a discipline, but have to be seen in the context of the rise of disciplinarity and scientism itself. In turn, the purposes of disciplinarity and scientism in assuring (disciplined and scientific) 'knowledge' to the interested service of governance also have to be interrogated (see Zein-Elabdin, this volume). Thus, the disciplinary knowledge of economics is intimately reliant upon its universalism, scientism, and teleology in order to remain relevant as a modernist body of knowledge.

The 'facts' of economics need to appear as universal, scientific, and emancipatory to those who abide by them. Uncovering the lineage of these 'facts' in the interested entrails of history, power, and agency requires postcolonial engagement.

There is an immense slippage of meaning as we go from 'economics' (as a social science) to 'economy' (maneuver or a physical entity presumed to exist already performed) to the 'economic' (a category often seen as split from the moral, political, social, ethical, cultural, etc.). Mirowski (1994: 54) writes that the constitution of the economy as an entity amenable to a narrow construction of analysis is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, precipitated out of a debate over the potential for a unified science of

8 Charles Dickens in "On strike," *Household Words*, 1854 writes

"I believe, ... that into the relations between employers and employed, as into all the relations of this life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance and consideration; ... *and is not exactly stateable in figures*; otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit."

(in Henderson 2000: 149 emphasis added)

society. Nelson (1999) discusses the split of the 'economic' from the 'moral' and perceptively argues that the question is not about how to bring together the moral and the economic, but rather how and why we periodically fall into a strong belief that they are separate. And of course, this belief that the 'economic' is away and apart from the cultural, social, and the political is a powerful one (see Danby, this volume) and is bolstered by a misplaced faith in the logical and scientific nature of economics – that the economy is what it is and the economists create a factual picture of it in a scientific way and that, there is simply no question about the 'obviousness' of economic laws – that we can never get something for nothing (so exchange), that scarcity is a fact of life, that the market has its own logic and so on. Undeniably, some of these (and other) statements might hold in certain specific situations, but by positing them as *the beyond* of questioning – by treating these and other commonplace ideas about the 'economic' as foreclosed – economics can proceed as if given the circumstances, its discourse is the best we can do. As good as it gets. Dr Pangloss and “the best of all possible worlds.”⁹

This is not a picture specific to neoclassical economics, although neoclassical economics has been important in cementing the 'scientific status' of the discipline (that which disciplines knowledge claims) by its unprecedented homage at the altar of mathematics in the twentieth century. The epistemic violence of modernist universalism can be seen in the primacy of numbers within the conception of what 'counts' – either as theory (in formalist methods) or as evidence (as with the McCloskean use of growth as empirical “fact” that settles all questions). Poovey (1998) describes how numbers have a history of being pre- and yet non-interpretive, and the crucial role that they have played in the construction of what she calls the “modern fact.” Kanth (1997) in his critique of the Eurocentrism of economics writes “mathematics, in effect, serves the same ideological function, in economics, that masses in Latin served the priesthood of the Church” – namely, to provide a misleading semblance of dignity to an otherwise “self-referential language game with zero representational efficacy” (4). And this is paralleled by a yearning for “objectivity” within modernism.¹⁰ General and universal knowledge is best explored in symbols that exclude the complexity and ambiguity of human contexts.

⁹ Dr Pangloss is the character in Voltaire's *Candide* (1929 [1759]) who proclaims that everything happens for the best in this – “the best of all possible worlds.”

¹⁰ In addition, the role of mathematics is especially important to unpack from its connections as a partner to Occidental science (compass-globe-map quests). Mathematics and science are seen as primarily European ventures (notwithstanding Aryabhatta, Bhaskaracharya, Hypatia, Susruta, Charak and so on). With postcolonial memory, we can recover that which has been forgotten – the non-European traditions (see Joseph *et al.* 1990, Joseph 2000, Bishop 1995). This will highlight the implicatedness of European accounts of knowledge (not to mention a specific construction of “the economic”) in imperial-colonial ventures.

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The tension between the heterogeneity of human contexts and the desire to generate universal knowledge can be seen as having its origin in the modernist post-Enlightenment type economics itself. Coleman (1995: 67) discusses the Humean arguments on the existence of general laws of human nature and laws of human motivation. These were prompted by a desire to reconcile the heterogeneity of human societies with certain empirically confirmed uniformities. Thus, for Hume, we should not accept 'travellers' tales' since the commonplace of one society can easily be made to appear strange by the tales based on a foreigner's eye. Now, this is important since the Humean story that there are some general principles which are legitimized by experience rests on delegitimizing 'travellers' tales,' it rests on the writing out of difference. This was, of course, consonant with the Western Enlightenment agenda of 'explaining' difference away in the process of 'discovering' underlying generalities and finding rational explanations to account for deviations from the norm. So that,

Enlightenment history was not interested in the diversity of mankind's experience; it was interested in explaining its general character; they were searching for 'general man': 'Man in general, like the economic man, was a being that did not exist in the world of time and place, but in the conceptual world, and he could be found only by abstracting from all men in all times and all places those qualities all men shared.

(Becker in Coleman 1991: 73)

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This is the important sense in which economics bears the imprints of a painful but thoroughly rigorous process over time of getting at general principles. It is painful because of what it has left in its wake, and continues to this day – in converting all forms of knowledge to *Knowledge*, an endeavor of immense epistemic violence as it abstracts out those who 'do not fit' in the story (see Callari, this volume, on the bordering of economic space). Needless to say, I'm not positing economics as a monolithic doctrine but rather I'm attempting to draw attention to the elements in certain economic thought-strings that have remained beyond questioning and are, thus, accepted in modern-day economics as 'fundamental.' A powerful example of the violence of universalism is the presumption that human suffering is created primarily through the prevalence of scarcity – "always and everywhere." Wennerlind (2000) creatively unpicks the premise in his work on the historical specificity of scarcity, where he argues the "unimaginable" – what if scarcity is the result of rules of conduct prescribed by economic theory in its quest for efficiency, utility, and profits, what if it is a societal condition created by the confluence of a particular set of historically specific institutions? That capitalism did not invent insufficiency but made it perpetual, and that the modern economist's theoretical explanation of scarcity is historically questionable and ideologically loaded. He writes, "the positing of a universal preexisting

condition like scarcity then allows for the application of [their] theoretical constructs and methods to all societies and time periods ... by assuming that scarcity is perpetual and ahistorical, modern economics becomes relevant as 'cosmology' " (ibid.: 4).

The attempt for universality and generality is achieved through an appeal to the 'obviousness' of economic principles. This is another way in which economic discourses serve to create plausible truths – by explaining everything in terms of the simplest commonplace, to make it believable ("of course, people are self-interested"). This again can be traced to the Enlightenment impetus to 'explain away' the strange and the different – Hume's disregard for 'travellers' tales' and Lionel Robbins's (1935) judgment that economic postulates are "so much the stuff of our everyday experience that they have only to be stated to be recognised as obvious" (Coleman 1995: 152).

Or even Alfred Marshall's famous "economics is the study of mankind in the ordinary business of life" (*Principles of Economics*, p. 1). Thus, economic theory is common sense, it's right-where-you-are, just-open-your-eyes to see its flawless logic. No wonder then that there is no unambiguous way of delineating the 'economic' realm. As Coleman notes, for Smith the *average* indicated the *natural*, but even more it was for him the *normal*,

in each species of creatures, what is the most beautiful bears the strongest characters of the *general fabric* of the species, and has the strongest resemblance to the *greater part* of the individuals with which it is classed. *Monsters*, on the contrary, or what is perfectly deformed, are *always the most singular and odd*, and have the *least resemblance* to the *generality* of that species to which they belong.

(Coleman 1995: 135, emphases added)

Where does difference reside in this obvious and obviously universal world? Monsters *de-monstrate*.¹¹ Difference in economic theory (as in a lot of other modernist progenies of the Enlightenment) is called upon to verify sameness, to serve as a testimony of abnormality.¹² Generality and

11 The etymology of the word "demonstrate" owes to monsters.

12 Examples of this can be found in the close relations between the anthropological and ethnological agenda of modernism and the expectations of the science of political economy (see Darity 1995). Dimand (2001: 13) gives the example of Jevons (one of the founders of the neoclassical marginalist "revolution") who like Nassau Senior did not believe that the English working-class or the Irish made rational intertemporal choices: deploring the "ignorance, improvidence, and brutish drunkenness of our lower working classes" which led them to save too little and marry too early. Similarly, Irving Fisher (famous economist and also founder of the American Eugenics Society in 1923) also attributed lack of foresight and willpower to particular ethnic groups. In other words, economic instances which do not testify to an interested norm are seen as irrational and abnormal.

Sameness solve a lot of problems in relation to knowledge – the same economic model is applied across all place and time. Difference is not allowed to matter in any fundamental way, the Other exists in the margins of the narrative as an irrational possibility (the Caliban, the Friday) but *essentially* is not treated as much more than an additional factor of interest. Efforts to problematize the identity of the sovereign subject of Western knowledge rely upon invoking the Other as a limit phenomenon, but never let this interrupt their ‘own’ binding together as One-self. Spivak (1988) examines the dynamics of this process where the subaltern is “spoken for” in representation. The denial of any “incomprehensible Otherness” (which may then lead to attempts to rethink the economic narrative from a different, anOther point of view) is a denial of alterity.

The economic world is only made of one type of individual – infinitely multiplied – *me-selves in a hall of many mirrors* And this universalization of sameness and (unsuccessful) erasing of difference has brought about immense violence – both epistemic and (more) ‘real.’ Difference as discontinuity is seen as a deviation from the continuity of history. The unfolding teleology as a continuous narrative of betterment allows ‘episodes’ such as slavery, imperialism, colonialism, to be seen as particular deviant moments in universal reason which are now ‘over’ – finished and deserve to be forgotten (or remembered as a relic of the chronological past that is not-here and not-now). Recall, “History is not a concept that explains but is to be explained” (Godelier in Kanth 1997: 118). The ‘subject-world’ of economics needs to be disrupted with a postcolonial memory – a way of being able to wrestle with the failed foreclosures of powerful historical-ideological narratives. History is not settled yet, we haven’t even begun to solve the questions of how to ask the questions. Which is why we need to unleash the provocative postcolonial as the confounding of the orderly tales of time.

Acknowledging the Other is to avow the anxious self. To admit the possibility that we cannot always think out the a priori ‘economic,’ that we cannot imagine its negotiations for every Other always. And so the whole set of ideas that are consonant with this particular way of delineating the economic, cannot be universal either. As Judith Butler writes,

For what happens to the notion of equality when it becomes economic equality? And what happens to the notion of the future when it becomes an economic future? We ought not simply to ‘plug in’ the economic as the particular field whose conditions of possibility can be thought out *on an apriori level*. It may also be that the *very sphere of the economic needs to be rethought genealogically*. Its separation from the cultural, for instance . . .

(Butler 2000: 277–8 emphases added)

To address the challenge raised by Butler, we need to challenge the modernism of economics. This entails going well beyond the effort to

critique economics from within the terms of modernism. It entails writing economics differently, but, how do we write difference?

Diacritics or calling intertext¹³

The writing of theory then ceases to be a general and universal exercise, but becomes a critical enterprise which in challenging the completeness of theoretical space, also replays that space differently, rescuing its contours and shaking away its certainties. A postcolonial theory of the economic recognizes the status of economics as a contingent episteme whose coming of age seamlessly ties in with the post-Enlightenment esteem of modernism. Theorizing becomes an engagement that is not a method prior to a factual world but is woven into what it seeks to represent. The writing of economic theory is then no longer the writing of formal proofs in economics departments or journals, but a questioning of how we come to recognize something as economic, what interests are served by it, and how this varies across time and place.

In terms of knowledge production, this requires that the transcendental referent of modernist knowledge, the individual subject of liberal humanist global cosmopolitan and universal emancipatory discourse, the generic individual *I* be displaced as the measure of all knowing. The very conceptualization of 'knowledge' and what it means 'to know' is to be altered. The individual subject transcendental referent¹⁴ that holds together the *urtext* of the economic, the original map of economics, will hang questioned. There is no economic self in market economy that economics can divine by models, but is constituted by utterances, differently and never alike. It needs to be written in its various presences, in locations and in memory (temporal, spatial, geographical, historical, ideological, to name some).

13 This phrase "Diacritics or calling intertext" is inspired by a review of Ronell's *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* by Schuerewegen (1994).

14 Solomon (1988) terms this self-referential subjectivity the "transcendental pretence." He writes "The transcendental pretence is the unwarranted assumption that there is universality and necessity in the fundamental modes of human experience. It is not mere provincialism, that is, the ignorance or lack of appreciation of alternative cultures and states of mind. It is an aggressive and sometimes arrogant effort to prove that there are no such (valid) possible alternatives. In its application the transcendental pretence becomes the a priori assertion that the structures of one's own mind, culture, and personality are in some sense necessary and universal for all humankind, perhaps even 'for all rational creatures'. In the realms of morality, politics, and religion it is the effort to prove that there is but one legitimate set of morals (the middle-class morals of Europe), one legitimate form of government (the form of parliamentary monarchy that ruled most of Western Europe), and one true religion, to be defended not just by faith and with force of arms, but by rational argument, by 'reason alone' " (7).

Bhabha (1996) unpacks his library¹⁵ and when Adrienne Rich and Martha Nussbaum turn up, he considers the different ways in which both of them propose that “our contemporary historical moment requires to be read, and framed, in temporalities that articulate transition, or the uncanny moments in a process of social transformation...” (200). Through difference emerges globality – but for Bhabha (and for me) the unanswered questions remain. As he eloquently asks, “What is the sign of ‘humanness’ in the category of the cosmopolitan? Where does the subject of global enquiry or injury stand, or speak from? To what does it bear relation, from where does it claim responsibility?” (ibid.).

Where, in other words, did we find the ground beneath our feet? In history, in memory, in the translation of identity through inhabited spaces of in/ability? For Nussbaum (see also Nussbaum and Sen 1993, Nussbaum and Glover 1995, Charusheela 2001, Menon 2002), as Bhabha points out, “the ‘identity’ of cosmopolitanism demands a spatial imaginary: the ‘self’ at the centre of a series of concentric circles that move through the various cycles of familial, ethnic and communal affiliation to the ‘largest one, that of humanity as a whole’” (Bhabha 1996: 200). Her “universalism”, he says, is provincial in a specific, early imperial sense and so her “fellow city dwellers” (what about the refugees, migrants, those fleeing poverty, health and ecological disasters, illegal invisible workforce?) are at “disjunctures” where the adequacy of her pedagogical proposals for good society or social virtue is questionable. In Rich, Bhabha sees a possibility to think a certain identification with “globality”, based on the need to establish a transhistorical “memory” (201). And the “I” is staged differently – the human, the certain “I” is not the foregrounded stable location from which cosmopolitan virtues can be imagined – but they are *anxious identities we inhabit* (see Kaul 2003) – so that the I is “*translational rather than concentric*” (Bhabha 1996: 204). If we follow this, the ways we approach difference begin to shift. And as a result, the way we theorize begins to change. We can learn to think of the categories ‘economy’ and the ‘economic’ as being mediated through genders, cultures, historical trajectories.

Charting the seas of normative assertions to locate specific cultural gendered linguistic historical traditional ways of delineating and making sense of the so-called universal ‘economic’ experience, has the potential for a radically different social science. It opens up very different stories of economic life (more than just consumered existence), that intersect with the translations of that ‘economic’ in us. A postcolonial intervention in the writing of economics is not simply a critique of disciplinary mathematical

15 As he unpacks his crate of books, among the texts that emerge are Rich’s “Eastern War-time” from *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems, 1988–1991* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991) and Nussbaum’s essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” in the *Boston Review* (1994), 19(5).

formalism, inapplicability to the real world, or even, a challenge to the limits of the modern subject at its heart (Cullenberg *et al.* 2001). It is rather a bringing into question of the very possibility of writing the economic universally and scientifically in presence of the present.

Writing is a deeply divided and dividing act, subject as it is to the politics of elision and ellipsis. The excess of meaning that hides behind the silhouette of the alphabet and plays in the silent spaces between – animates them with absence. Writing is difficult for what it allows and what it does not let happen. The mark privileges and the unsaid is not the same as the unwritten – it is political and poetic for it constitutes the legitimacy of voice, the transfer and translation of value. Language, the maker-doer “can only indefinitely tend towards justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it” (Derrida, quoted in Baker 1993: 16). Economic theory written as a self-aware exercise of power and memory is an acknowledgment of the limitations of theoretical endeavors to be finally adequate. The postcolonial has involved marking ‘the West’ as a contested site of power, its legitimacy to speak under the sign of the human is questioned and its own constitution unravelled. Theory is not the rooted preserve of the powerful, it *travels* along *routes*.¹⁶ Like concurrent prison sentences, histories run concurrently (though not in parallel), and the history one remembers and writes depends on the routes one has travelled. The routes along which theoretical ideas travel to new contexts is a meaningful terrain – a migrant intertextual inbetween hybrid space: A powerful resisting non-assimilative space that questions the dominant alignment of ideas as natural or normal; A catachrestic and detourning¹⁷ space for imagining theoretical endeavors that challenges the practice of theory itself. Theory not as interpreting or explaining but understanding its own conditions of performance and its particular arrangements of mediation in making and accessing the world.

An engaged writing cannot but be political. Writing economic theory an *Other* way is to question that which we think we know – the ‘economic’: its basis in individualism, in self-interest, in the calculus of comprehension, in value, in ownership, in consumption, in production, in extraction, and in deprivation. It opens up a radical way of imagining economics – as multiple, polyvocal, and as the garnering of social political economic insights in a contextual manner.

16 Here we can juxtapose Clifford’s (1988) concept of Routes (the emphasis in identity on the migratory routes of its inhabiting rather than its fixed roots) with Said’s (1984, 1994) notion of the Traveling Theory (theory travels from its originating context to new ones where it is critically appropriated and interpreted).

17 Detournment is a situationist term which can be understood as “... to arrange disparate elements of the dominant culture together to form a new work, esp. in a way that reveals the true meaning and function of the original elements. Detournment as revolutionary activity reverses the systematic fragmentation of specialists ...” (Anti-Capital Webzine n.d.).

Penpoints on mirrors¹⁸

It is a meaningless reverie to indulge in endless disputes on the scientific nature of economics (is it? is it not?). The discussion here suggests that there never was or will be an 'economic' per se – except in the terrible logic of economic theory. Instead, postcolonial thought suggests that we urgently need to write economics anOther way. The meeting of postcolonial and economic ideas can be anOther way of writing economic theory – as a contextual social political economy praxis.¹⁹ Such engagements upset conventional ways of telling accepted stories in economics, let alone face the question, what is economics about? Like the anxieties of the regime in Bertolt Brecht's poem,²⁰ power, even as disciplinary power, seeks to censure the unfamiliar.

Writing economic theory anOther way is an important step in refiguring the altered possibilities of knowledge in/of economics. Such a project should not admit the worry of getting the right theory, but acknowledge the impossibility – even the violence – of comprehension involving a multiplicity of subjectivities. This multiplicity is not conjoined by science, but requires thinking in dramatically different ways about subjectivity and economic interaction, including the role of our theories about economy in the enactment of economic practices. In this difficult engagement, "let a hundred flowers bloom and we don't mind even the weeds" (Guha in Shohat and Stam 1994: 203). Penpoints on mirrors. Shall we?

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18 I have used the phrase "penpoints on mirrors" to capture the idea of a writing that reflects its own conditions of performance. The term "penpoints" draws from the title of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's (1998) book *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* in which he explores the confrontation between art (penpoints) and the state (gunpoints) both of which are rooted in words and hold the society together.

19 I briefly mention this here. It is a part of ongoing theoretical endeavor – so a sketch not an answer.

20 Given the immense powers of the regime
 Its camps and torture cellars
 Its well-fed policemen
 Its intimidated or corrupt judges
 Its card indexes and lists of suspended persons
 Which fill whole buildings to the roof
 One would think they wouldn't have to
 Fear an open word from a simple man.

from Brecht's 'Anxieties of the Regime' (in Wa Thiong'o 1998: 9–10).

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Creating spaces

A comment on contemporary discourses in economics

Drucilla K. Barker

It has become commonplace to note that contemporary economics can be understood as stories. Modern economics tells stories of affluence and emancipation that accrue to 'society,' the members of which remain unnamed and unseen. These stories are more than just stories; they constitute the economic and naturalize the unequal and unjust consequences of economic policies. The three essays in this section listen to those stories with a postcolonial ear and call our attention to the ghosts, the Others, and the all too real violence that haunts the margins of these Panglossian narratives.

The chapter by Joseph Medley and Lorryne Carroll examines the narratives that the IMF, one of the most powerful economic institutions in the world today, uses to explain and rationalize the Asian financial collapse of the 1990s. The main outline of the IMF story of development is that capital inflows into 'developing' countries create new jobs and lead to national economic growth. The collapse in Asia was simply the unfortunate, short run effect of distortions and inefficiencies in Asian markets, rather than the consequence of ill-considered economic policies designed to benefit international investors. Thus the language of the IMF narratives, both by the fund and by its boosters, obscures and ultimately erases the overwhelming hardship and human suffering that IMF policies have inflicted on large portions of the populations of Southeast Asia. At the same time, it quite conveniently camouflages the fallacies and contradictions in the economics of policies promulgated by the IMF.

Medley and Carroll link the tropes of Marx's critique of nineteenth-century capitalism with the contemporary condition in the postcolonial world via the Marxian metaphor of capitalist exploitation as a vampire and the hungry ghosts and other specters in the work of the novelist Lawrence Chua (1998) and anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1987). Their narratives uncover the steps in the constitution of laboring bodies as commodities to be exploited by transnational capital, and the strategies of resistance to it.

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Gender is central to this constitution because these laboring bodies are female bodies. Women are considered the ideal workforce in Southeast Asia.

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They are seen as passive, dependent, and malleable, qualities which make them easily subject to capital; however, this process is never complete because workers have recourse to their own "psychic apparatus" which allows them to interpret and resist their conditions. The work of Chua and Ong reveals the tensions between the discursive strategies on the part of transnational capital to fashion workers whose gender identity is tied up in an image of themselves as modern, independent, wage-earners and the forms of resistance to these strategies. This resistance is expressed in terms of ghosts and spirits not only because other more conventional means are foreclosed to them, but because specters are culturally powerful symbols, powerful enough to resist the hegemonic power of transnational capital.

This is an important chapter that opens many doors for further critical reflection, in particular, a further examination of the various ways that transnational capital exercises its power in Southeast Asia. The story that Carroll and Medley tell is a story of power as repression. As Foucault reminds us, however, power is both a condition of subjection and the field through which subjectivity is constituted. Individuals are not only the subjects of power, but also its articulation (1980). Power in this sense is diffuse, omnipresent, and manifested through social practices and institutions. What are the social practices and institutions through which power is manifested? That is to say, what are the local institutions and practices through which the pronouncements and policies of the IMF are interpellated? How do these local institutions and practices, particularly with regard to gender, both accommodate and resist the needs of transnational capital? In particular, how are feminist narratives that conflate gender emancipation with participation in waged labor circulated in Southeast Asia?

Theorizing the social constructions of gender *vis-à-vis* the imperatives of transnational capital is fraught with difficulties that lie in the troubled relationship between Western feminism and colonialism. As Chandra Mohanty (1991), Frédérique Apffel-Marglin (1996), Uma Narayan (1997), and others have pointed out, Victorian British feminism was a full partner in the colonial processes. The treatment of women was considered the measuring rod of civilization, and the standard of British Victorian womanhood was the standard against which all others were measured. Freeing women from the oppression of their own cultures was a large part of the moral rationale for the colonial enterprise. The representations of poor, 'Third World' women in the early women in development literature (WID) had much in common with the earlier Victorian representations. Women's emancipation comes through modernization and integration into industrial capitalism. Tradition and social constraints were identified as barriers to women's access to the market. WID discourse posited a universal subordination of women and promoted development as the vehicle for eradicating sexism. The oppression of women justifies the

creation of a compliant female labor force to serve the needs of transnational capital.

Although the rhetoric around women and development (as well as gender and development) has become much more sophisticated, much work remains to be done in order to reconcile the emancipatory ideals of contemporary feminism with those of postcolonialism. The chapter by Jennifer Olmsted is an important step in that direction.

Olmsted focuses on the representations of Muslim women in the work of feminist economists Barbara Bergmann (1995) and Shoshana Grossbard-Shechtman and Shoshana Neuman (1998) to illuminate the ways that the authors reproduce orientalism in feminist economics.

One of the most prominent features of orientalist accounts is that they construct the East out of the imagination of the West, and in doing so define the West in contrast to the Oriental other. Barbara Bergmann's treatment of Muslim women does precisely this. It defines the autonomous, emancipated Western woman in opposition to an imagined, dependent, oppressed Muslim woman. Substituting imagination for argument and evidence allows Bergmann to mischaracterize both polygyny (which she refers to as polygamy) and monogamy, a move that impedes inquiry into how these two different forms of the patriarchal marriage contract affect women's economic and social status. Similarly, her discussion of women's seclusion facilitates an imagined public sphere as a place of emancipation. This echoes the rhetoric in the early women in development literature (although Bergmann is not a development scholar), a rhetoric that goes far in advancing the interests of transnational capital. It should be remembered that for many poor women, Muslim or otherwise, the public sphere as place of emancipation means, in actuality, employment as a production worker in an export processing zone, or as a maid in the home of the wealthy, or as a food vendor on the street, or as a sex worker in a brothel. Surely, emancipation must mean more.

It may be naively assumed that the rhetorical problems discussed here may be solved by recourse to empirical data. Olmsted's reading of Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman discredits that notion. Like Bergmann, Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman uncritically conflate women's liberation with access to paid labor markets. They then examine women's paid labor force participation in terms of religious practices and ethnicity. This quickly breaks down into two categories, Muslim/non-Muslim, collapsing the wide diversity of social practices and relations into a simple binary. Of course, empirical work requires using categories which always abstract from particular differences. The question is, however, what assumptions about sameness and difference lie behind the categories? Olmsted carefully articulates the various aspects of religion, culture, nationality, and ethnicity that are obscured by this move. What this move does, however, is to allow Christian and Jewish women to be defined in contrast to the other, to women from the

Muslim East. Again, autonomy and emancipation become the province of Western women.

Deep in the heart of the orientalist move in feminist economics is the generally unquestioned assumption that the gender division of labor, which assigns women to caretaking tasks in the home and men to income earning in the market, is a universal cause of women's subjugation regardless of time, culture, or place. Postcolonial feminists must, however, question the cultural and historical specificity of this assumption. First, because the notion of a separation of the public sphere of work and commerce and private sphere of home and family is a historically specific artifact that emerged with the growth of liberal political philosophy and the development of industrial capitalism. Second, as S. Charusheela (2003) has persuasively argued, the ability of some women to become empowered through paid employment is made possible by the very poorly paid labor of less fortunate women (and some men). It is through the labor of mostly poor women that goods and services which can no longer be produced within the home are produced by the market at relatively low costs. The empowering world of employment for privileged women is made possible by the drudgery of others.

Transnational capital requires women's labor and so it is a serious mistake to uncritically equate paid employment with emancipation. Doing so only obscures visions of liberation that do not require the toil of the less fortunate. Doing socially progressive, postcolonial, feminist economics requires new visions. But is such an economics even possible? That is the question taken up by Nitasha Kaul's chapter.

Neoclassical economics is defined by its method rather than its subject, and that method is formal mathematical modeling with all its attendant assumptions about objectivity, rationality, and universality. Although the critics of neoclassical economics are many, Kaul argues that they have generally written from within the confines of modernism. The 'differences' that are central to postcolonial thought cannot be adequately theorized within the modernist paradigm.

Kaul's reading of an influential article on methodology (Thompson 1999) calls attention to the thin notion of subjectivity implied by economic theory. The neoclassical subject is absent all the particularities of history, nation, or culture. Mainstream economic theory is likewise devoid of these particularities, a move which facilitates the construction of economic facts about growth rates, consumption, and other economic categories, that tell very particular stories about the world. Like the stories of the IMF, the facts these stories use repress the cruelty and barbarism of colonial history and contemporary neocolonialism. And again, the products of Western imaginations are presented as facts.

The role of mathematics in providing the truth value to these stories is not to be underestimated. Facts are phenomena that can either be counted, as in empirical work, or formalized, as in theory. Kaul cites

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Rajani Kanth's argument that mathematics serves economics by adding dignity to what is otherwise a "self-referential language with zero representational efficacy" (Kanth 1997: 4). Kaul goes on to argue that in the modernist paradigm, universality and generality mean that knowledge must be expressed in symbols that exclude complexity and ambiguity. While I agree with the sentiments expressed in this quote, and in Kaul's further elaboration, I would add that the power of contemporary economics does not lie only, or even primarily, in its representational efficacy, or in any other criterion of science such as prediction. Rather, like the doctrines of the Medieval church, mainstream economics provides a way of making sense of the world and one's position in it. Like the Latin mass (Kanth 1997), the appeal of mathematics in economic theory functions on several levels: to preserve economics as an elite knowledge and separate the initiated from the uninitiated; to cloak the pronouncements of economists in gravity and dignity, and to obscure the role of power in the construction of economic knowledge. But like the Latin mass, the power of economics to construct facts and order material life in ways that preserve privilege and reproduce hierarchies, is derived from desire as well as repression.

The modernist paradigm of knowledge is a powerful one precisely because it speaks to the yearnings of many to find a common humanity, to speak truth to power, and to comprehend the forces that seem to govern their lives. The irony, however, is that it is these very sentiments which allow modernism to serve as the ideological handmaiden of the privileged. So how can postcolonial theorists create a space to articulate an oppositional consciousness to the coercion of unified, rigid, and formal economics? Creating such a space entails understanding the world in terms of complexity, ambiguity, and historical specificity. Without such understanding, the Other is only a foil for the imagination and material privilege of those whose social location and privilege allow them to participate in knowledge production.

What then are some of the contours of a postcolonial economics? According to Kaul, economics would become a critical enterprise questioning how it is that phenomena come to be considered economic, whose interests are served by this classification, and how these things vary temporally and geographically. The generic knowing subject, the 'I' of modernism, would be displaced in favor of various and discursively constituted subjects. The goal of theory would not be to interpret or explain, but rather to understand how theory mediates and constitutes the world.

The three chapters in this section have shown us that although economic theories are stories, they are not stories about the world. Rather they are stories that constitute the world in ways that erase difference and legitimate poverty, inequality, and misery. Moreover, the hegemony of mainstream economics is not the result of its superior representation of the real, but rather of its intimate connections with power. Hegemonic

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knowledge projects like mainstream economics always have gaps and fissures that potentially create spaces through which they may be contested. The chapters in this section enlarge and illuminate these spaces.

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Ethicizing economics, or for that matter, any discourse

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I would like to thank Eiman Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela for the opportunity to compose these brief comments in response to the thought-provoking essays by Joseph Medley and Lorraine Carroll, Jennifer Olmsted, and Nitasha Kaul. An anecdote, if I may, by way of situating the theme of the essay. It has to do with the manner in which the news of the Nobel Prize Award to Amartya Sen was received in some quarters. To many, what he was doing was not real or hard core economics. It was ethics, it was a kind of humanistic politics of advocacy and partisanship. The same sort of controversy occurred, albeit from a different direction, when Herbert Simon won the Nobel Prize in Economics. It was considered by many that he was a cognitive psychologist, and not an economist proper. These disagreements raise profound questions about the nature of disciplinarity and the nature of disciplinary accountability to the 'world without.' How is accountability to be calculated and calibrated, and in relationship to what imperatives? Would these imperatives be determined within the 'relative autonomy' of the discipline in question, or would it be a matter of responding to pre- and/or extra disciplinary (what after Derrida (1974) could be called the "*hors-texte*") demands and needs? If any discipline decided to go 'self-reflexive,' how would that language of the critique establish its bite into the 'primary stuff' of the discipline? To put it differently, what would it mean for economics to 'ethicize' itself? Would the ethical impulse come from within economics, or would it need to emerge from 'the outside?'

The essay "The hungry ghost" begins strategically with the language of crisis and the kind of 'critical knowledge' that crises can produce. The 'third' or 'developing world,' it would seem is both the symptom (hence pathological) and the honorific 'subject' of developmentalist discourse. It is indeed *as crisis and a crisis of and within global capitalism* that the 'developing world' assumes 'subjecthood' within such a discourse. The question that the authors raise, by way of Arturo Escobar and Gayatri Spivak, is: Ought the 'developing world' be summarily reduced to the ontology of crisis, and *ergo* to the remedial regime of the IMF and its 'structural solutions?' To quote from the essay: "People who labor under the conditions

produced by IMF's policies are 'subject' to capital, but they also have recourse to their own 'psychic apparatus' in order to interpret, resist and counter the conditions that subject them" (Chapter 6, p. 147). Nicely stated indeed. What needs to be clarified is the nature of the 'signification process' by which the "psychic apparatus" of the people will succeed in making these policies 'their own.'

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It is interesting, and in a sense limiting, that the authors resort to the term "psychic apparatus" of the people as they envision a postcolonial and/or subaltern wresting of agency from a dominant paradigm. Whether it was intended or not, this register serves to reiterate and empower the inner/outer, the psychic/political differentiation of reality. The 'engendering' of the psychic apparatus as the moment of re-inscription, rearticulation, and of 'interpretation against the grain' raises significant issues about the nature of feminist agency within and athwart national sovereignty. The connection between the laboring female body and the "spectrality" of the real that they invoke I feel requires stronger elaboration. My fear and concern always is that female bodies and feminist demands tend to get instrumentalized and allegorized even within friendly and protagonistic discourses. After a powerful and moving analysis of Lawrence Chua's fiction, the authors fade out on a register of ambivalence, routed through Marx, and I would like to submit that this figural spectral ambivalence needs to be identified and recognized agentially. The spectrality of the lie given to "the IMF's modernist, progressive fable of development," is well and good figuratively speaking. My anxiety is that a mere symptomatic reading of the 'lack' does not right away empower a politics of agential representation. The ambivalence is in need of a more rigorously polemical embodiment.

On a different note, given the authors' invocation of Marx and Marxism, I wish they had spent just a little more time unpacking the relationship among 'capital,' the IMF, and the relationship of the postcolonial state to capital. If 'capital as such' is the enemy, then we would do well to ask: "What would/should it mean for the post-colonial state to play the game of 'strategic capitalism?'" The part of the essay that had me exclaim "YES YES" in partisan support is where the authors make the all important qualitative distinction between "the history that is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire," (Marx) and "the bloodless, if succinct, language of the IMF's credo" (Chapter 6, p. 151). One way of saying this might be: Whereas Marx's vision was ethico-political and 'double-conscious' in so far as it reads the same transformation as both empowering and enslaving, the real IMF economists are only too happy to disengage the economic domain from the political and the ethical, and on that basis tout their strategies of 'winner take all,' a zero sum game where peoples everywhere are and will be left behind in the name of universal progress.

Feminisms function both as powerful ethico-political worldviews/ideologies and as amazingly subtle procedures of analyses and diagnoses.

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The essay by Jennifer Olmsted undertakes the daunting task of reading and valorizing feminism conjuncturally, and the forces that constitute the conjuncture are Orientalism, Islam, Feminism, and Economics. The author makes an important and decisive move right away when she identifies the reality that “Said and subsequent postcolonial scholars, have been more likely to analyze literature and history, than to focus on the ways in which contemporary social sciences have contributed to orientalism” (Chapter 7, p. 165). I think she is right on: there are indeed strong and axiomatic culturalist assumptions within postcolonial studies that need to be contextualized and relativized with reference to other discourses. It is indeed quite conceivable and quite likely that the effects of orientalism might well be similar across the board: but the important concern is to do justice to the specificity of effects within their determinate domains. We cannot afford to ignore the important lessons in “contradiction” and “overdetermination” provided by Althusser (1969). The challenge that faces the author is the following: How to articulate Islam, Feminism, and Orientalism within the same representational grid? In other words: how to study the relationality that governs the relationship available among the three participants without trivializing the ‘truth claims’ of any one of the domains, keeping in mind of course that “Orientalism” is not a reputable body of knowledge? The author insightfully acknowledges a certain double bind here: on the one hand how to question unwarranted culturalist assumptions, and at the same avail of the ‘linguistic turn’ and the possibilities offered by discourse theory to “problematize the epistemological roots of economics and/or development theory” (Chapter 7, p. 166).

The author is quick to identify the issue of binarisms and binary thinking as at once historical and omni-historical, that is, belonging both to history and the ‘structuration’ of history. What then are the implications as binarity plays itself out historically both as East versus West (Judaeo-Christian-secular versus Islamic) and as Male versus Female? The essay takes up the onerous task of determining what it might mean to read Islam globally without necessarily acquiescing in the phenomenon of deracination or acontextualism. What are the ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ as binarity overlaps on binarity? How is an apologetic reading on behalf of Islam, in the overall context of the ‘occidental’ denigration of Islam, to be differentiated from an ‘objective’ protagonistic and critical affirmation of Islam from within its own socio-political and epistemic coordinates? In critical statements such as, “Bergmann’s orientalist usage allows her to maintain a hierarchical dualism that not only mischaracterizes polygyny, but also privileges an *imagined* monogamy” (Chapter 7, p. 170), the author demonstrates the connection between Orientalism as an epistemological horizon or lexicon and its application in specific contexts. My criticism would be that both in the general discussion of the problem and with reference to Israel, the essay tends to repeat the opposition of the global to the local, and does not do enough to demonstrate how the two categories

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have become co-constitutive. The real problem it seems to me is to identify which versions of the local and which versions of the global are 'good' and 'progressive,' and which not. Both the global and the local have powerful effects that get mobilized for one set of ideological reasons or another; and within such a mobilization the two binary poles tend to cannibalize each other (Appadurai 1990).

In her critique of the relationship of ethnicity to the state of Israel in an article by Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman, Olmsted focuses on the role that 'methodology' plays in perpetuating certain myths and long standing assumptions. She observes that although the authors "initially do make the case for a more complex reading of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish cultures in the context of Israel," they are betrayed by their methodologies and forced into the discourse of binaries. This is a crucial insight since it focuses on two fundamental issues: (1) the relationship within any domain between Truth and Method, and (2) the relationship between micropolitical professional practices and the 'objective anteriority' of what these practices are 'all about.' The essay warns us that methodologies may make such a deep imprint that we are liable to mistake the *imprimatur* of the imprint for reality itself. The author, by way of conclusion, agrees with postcolonial scholars who have suggested that "economics cannot be studied outside the context of cultural, social, political, and historical processes" (Chapter 7, p. 178). I am in complete agreement with the author's objective of combating the imperialistic stand taken by economics by rendering it historically contingent and 'un-innocent.' But this raises an even more complicated question: is there a consensus on what it means to 'historicize' when history itself begins to be contested between specialists and non-specialists?

Nitasha Kaul's essay dives right into the heart of the matter by aligning questions of method with issues of content. "Is there a postcolonial economics?" and if so, how is it to be valorized and legitimated: macropolitically, discursively, institutionally, ideologically? Is it axiomatic that "the subject of economics" is anchored within the transcendent authority of Enlightenment rationality, and if so, can we name and provincialize (Chakrabarty 2000) that rationality? What is the obligation of the postcolonial critique *vis-à-vis* Enlightenment thought (Spivak 1999)? Are there as many forms of self-reflexivity as there are disciplines, and if that is the case, has the very *ethic* of the critique 'always already' been spoken for in the name of the discipline? Here is a gem from the essay: "The writing of economic theory on these terms is not so much a theorizing of the "economic" in its content and evaluations, but rather a second order a priori formalized exercise where the method serves as a grid onto which any content can be mapped." Then comes the telling diagnosis that what is impoverished by such an analysis is "the comprehension of subjectivity" (6).

The problem is then how to realize 'theorization as critique' as a 'form of situated life or worldliness.' The Scylla and Charybdis being: on the

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one hand an eviscerated 'always already' algebra that can be read as totally indeterminate or as a justification of any given status quo, and on the other a 'naïve' vitalistic return to some form of pre-discursive or ante-disciplinary of 'phenomenology,' a return to 'things themselves,' in the name of a reality that should somehow be realized as politically and perspectively subaltern/postcolonial. The author goes after two forms of the a priori: one the a priori of the dominant universal against which the situated and the embodied can be mobilized in opposition, and the other, the axiomatics of facticity that disavows any constitutive connection with ideology, interpretation, and partisan interestedness. What is required of the radical critique is an 'authority' that is neither heteronomous nor autonomous; a kind of praxis that will perennially call into question the overdetermined opposition between 'insides' and 'outsides,' 'identity' and 'difference,' and between 'disciplinary interiority' and 'worldly exteriority.' There are two important moments in the essay that I wish had been brought together more intimately, more 'organically:' (1) where the author dares to think how economics might think its 'difference' from itself, and (2) where she insists that the questioning of economics also take the form of an interrogation of disciplinarity as such. When these two moments are collocated within an 'organic' solidarity, possibilities arise for 'speaking otherwise' in a manner that both honors and problematizes 'representation.' Moreover, the urgent rationale for change perhaps could be posed as a double form of accountability that has the rich and productive potential to turn into a Mobius-strip-like dimensionality: not a denial of insides and outsides, but an acknowledgment of an open interchangeability available to ethico-political agency.

All three essays commit themselves to the project of finding alternatives and resources of hope outside or beyond the body of the dominant text, and of redefining economic interest in opposition to the winner-take-all teleology of the developmentalist model. What I find quite enabling in all of these interventions is that they all foreground, each essay in its own way, the agonizing question of 'choice:' of how the collective human subject chooses one model, one methodology, one vision over another, and why. How the human subject adjudicates between means and ends, between loyalty to system and accountability to the protean flows of life. "There are more things in the world than are dreamt of in your philosophy," as Hamlet communicated to Horatio. The moral is not to abandon philosophy, but to constantly ethicize it in the name of life, and to seek through the finitude of the text "the spectrality" that haunts the text as its constitutive 'outside,' indeed as the inside of its outside.

Taking the essays as a whole, one notices that all three authors 'choose' development theory as the object of their critique; and that is an excellent polemical move. However, one cannot simply 'handle' the problem by making it one of 'development economics,' since the constitution of such a problematic is part of the overall epistemic constitution of the discipline

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itself, as these essays argue. Thus, it seems to me that one way to problematize the field of economics both discursively and with reference to its representational sovereignty over reality is to question the so-called primacy of 'economic interest,' as Kaul does. Too often the profound cliché that answers most forms of unrest is that of 'the bottom line' which is supposedly delineated in a language called economics. Clearly there are other interests: political, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, non-material. These essays encourage both the expert and the non-expert to think about 'choice' in a language other than that of the systemic/structural *fait accompli*, and to raise the all important question of 'the value of value' from the multiple locations and sites of messy but lived realities.

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