"The Econ tribe occupies a vast territory in the far North. Their land appears bleak and dismal to the outsider, and travelling through it makes for rough sledding; but the Econ, through a long period of adaptation, have learnt to wrest a living of sorts from it."

Axel Leijonhufvud had been living among the Econs for quite some time. At one point, he decided to write an account of their habits and habitations. It was a difficult task. The tribe was notorious for its distrust of the outsiders and held other neighborhood tribes in extreme contempt. As the brave ethnographer probed deeper into their societal structure, political institutions, and cultural practices, he was amazed by the sheer complexity, and yet complete absurdity, of most of their archaic rituals. The Econ society was characterized by caste hierarchies. The social status of its members depended on allegiance to separate caste formations. Of these formations, the priestly Math-Econs enjoyed the highest privilege. Moreover, the hierarchies were based on a peculiar practice with an overtly sacred undertone – the practice of building *modls*, a certain form of “implement” with “little or no practical use.” Leijonhufvud complained that the tribe was afflicted with “backwardness and abject cultural poverty” because of its obsession with manufacturing such worthless artifacts. Formerly, the “modl” had a concrete connotation, but as it evolved into an “abstract concept,” it started to

---

dominate “the Econ’s perception of virtually all social relationships – whether these be relations to other tribes, to other castes, or status relations within his caste.”

The above description is taken from a short essay by Axel Leijonhufvud, a Swedish economist teaching at a major American university in the 1970s. It takes a couple of minutes to get over the confusion and realize that Leijonhufvud is not talking about a “primitive tribe” located miles away from the bright corridors of university departments. The object of his ethnography resides almost literally at a hand’s distance – his own department, his own professional site of teaching and doing research in economics – and, with an abundant doze of self-deprecating humor, he makes it his business to study his own career as one of the leading experts on Keynesian theories of market disequilibria.

Although written in the spirit of light-hearted banter, this account is as serious as it gets. Even in his jocular mood, Leijonhufvud resuscitates some of the typical concerns of the critics of economic reason. The most important of them is, of course, the one which highlights the strained relationship between economic models (“modls” in their parodied form in his essay) and the reality that they claim to represent and transform. A similar sentiment is reverberated in Joseph Stiglitz’s Nobel Prize lecture in 2001. There he recalls, “When I began the study of economics some 41 years ago, I was struck by the incongruity between the models that I was taught and the world that I had seen growing up in Gary, Indiana.” Stiglitz soon convinced himself that, to avoid these incongruities, a dedicated economist should design models with more “realistic” assumptions and conclusions, “closer to those that accorded with the world [she] saw, with all its imperfections.” The final blow to his faith in economics came when he visited such “developing” countries like Kenya: “Models of perfect markets, as badly flawed as they might seem for Europe or America, seemed truly

---

3 Ibid, 330.
4 At the time of writing this essay, Leijonhufvud was teaching at the Department of Economics, University of California, Los Angeles. His original works in economics include the influential On Keynesian Economics and the Economics of Keynes: A Study in Monetary Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).
5 Peter Howitt, “A Dictionary Article on Axel Leijonhufvud’s On Keynesian Economics and the Economics of Keynes: A Study in Monetary Theory”, (January, 2002). Available at http://www.econ.brown.edu/fac/Peter_Howitt/publication/Dalloz.pdf (accessed on November 4, 2013). Most of the terms Leijonhufvud uses in his account are self-explanatory. The Econs are, of course, the economists; the Math-Econs are mathematical economists; and most cleverly, the modls are the models. Other than them, he also uses terms like “dept” (department) for the village of the Econ tribe and “field” for the word used by the Econs themselves to refer to their castes.
7 Ibid.
Introduction

inappropriate for these countries.” In the similar vein, Wassily Leontief, another Nobel laureate and the pioneer of the input-output analysis, cautioned his fellow economists of the manifest dangers of misdirected and non-empirical research. Leontief’s disenchantment found an obvious target in the overdose of abstraction that has rendered the discipline “irrelevant” in the practical field. There are a few points of commonality among all these views including the shared embarrassment over the inefficacy of economics in its application in life outside the models. Leijonhufvud and Leontief do not sweat over it, but Stiglitz here makes a distinction between the “developed” and the “developing” countries in terms of their socio-cultural specificities. Models which are only “flawed” in European or American conditions are also “inappropriate” in the less mature economies, as if the logic of inaccuracy is not enough, one has to design models for these “poverty ridden” and “socially backward” countries keeping in mind the “extra-economic” factors that are unintelligible to western mind, but are integral to the “imperfect world” of their existence.

Presumably, this notion of difference contributes to an understanding of the so-called “outside” of economic models – that mysterious zone of human actions, experiences, and thinking which seems to escape the gripping influence of economic conjectures and is governed by laws and principles of its own. There have been many attempts to come in terms with the mystery of this elusive outside. Stiglitz himself tried to reform the discipline by conceiving models with less restrictive assumptions like that of “information asymmetry.” Leijonhufvud insists on initiating dialogues with other

8 Ibid.
9 Wassily Leontief, “Theoretical Assumptions and Non-observed Facts”, The American Economic Review 61, no. 1 (March, 1971), 1-7. Writing in 1971, Leontief observed that, with the growing popularity of the discipline among the public and the policy makers alike, the volume of publications in academic economics had skyrocketed. “And yet,” he remarked, “an uneasy feeling about the present state of our discipline has been growing in some of us who have watched its unprecedented development over the last three decades” (ibid, 1).
10 Stiglitz, along with George Akerlof and Mike Spence, was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 2001 for his contributions in Information Economics, a new branch of the discipline, which deals with information discrepancies and their effects on decision making and market equilibriums. In his Nobel Prize lecture, Stiglitz points out that, in standard neoclassical models, the information shared by economic agents engaging in transactions with each other is assumed to be free of discrepancies, meaning, all agents possess same information regarding these transactions. But in reality, “different people know different things. Workers know more about their own abilities than the firm does; the person buying insurance knows more about his health, e.g., whether he smokes and drinks immoderately, than the insurance firm. Similarly, the owner of a car knows more about the car than potential buyers; the owner of a firm knows more about the firm that a potential investor; the borrower knows more about the riskiness of his project than the lender does; and so on” [Stiglitz, “Information and the Change in the Paradigm in Economics”, 469-70]. Stiglitz and his colleagues initiate a line of thinking which takes consideration of the incentives and the mechanisms that enable people to acquire and give out such information. Leontief, on the other hand, proposed a research program which would encourage repetitive internal assessments and posit a relation of mutuality between theoretical speculations and observed facts: “True advance can be achieved only through an iterative process in which improved theoretical formulation raises new empirical questions and the answers to these questions, in their turn, lead to new theoretical insights” [Leontief, “Theoretical Assumptions and Non-observed Facts”, 5].
disciplines for the sake of economics’ own survival. All these critical self-reflections explicate the crux of “realism” in economic studies. It consists of two fundamental assumptions: first, economic arguments can and should be universal; and second, the only way to achieve universality is to obtain as much information about the world as possible.

This leads actually to a contradiction in the concept of economic realism. The more “realistic” a model, the more “universal” is its appeal. But realism must also entail a sort of “localization” of the model itself. As Stiglitz suggests, in order to make her models more realistic, the economist should adopt as much as possible locally relevant assumptions consistent with the socio-cultural specificities of the regions where they are applied. This is particularly true for models of “development” which proliferated after the Second World War and focused on economic improvement in general – and eradication of mass poverty in particular – in countries fraught with various forms of “irrational” impediments to public well-being. It can be argued that the same contradiction between universal appeal and local/regional specificities is instrumental to the conception of modeling as a mode of investigation which acts as a mechanism of both representation and transformation of the projected

11 “In the midst of their troubles,” Leijonhufvud writes, “the Econ remain as of old a proud and warlike race. But they seem entirely incapable of “creative response” to their problems. It is plain to see what is in store for them if they do not receive outside help” [Leijonhufvud, “Living among the Econ”, 335]. By “outside help” he means interactions with other “tribes” like the Polscis and the Sociogs – the disciplines of political science and sociology respectively.

12 It is often argued that there were indications of “development ideas” in writings of the political economists from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries [see, for example, Jomo K. S. and Erik S. Reinert (eds.), The Origins of Development Economics: How Schools of Economic Thought Have Addressed Development (New Delhi: Tulika, 2006); and Jomo K. S. (ed.), The Pioneers of Development Economics: Great Economists on Development (New Delhi: Tulika, 2006)]. But, the post-war period saw a surge of interest in the concept of “development” which came out as a product of contemporary political and social transitions all over the world in the form of de-colonization of most of the Asian and African countries and adoption of economic planning as a viable means of initiating programs of public welfare. In the 1980s, development economics faced a great challenge as the sympathy for social democracy eroded in the west and the fall of the USSR marked the end of state socialism as an alternative to capitalist market economies. In response, newer theories of development started to circulate under the leadership of Joseph Stiglitz as the chief economist at the World Bank [Joseph Stiglitz, “The New Development Economics”, World Development 14, no. 2 (1986), 257-65]. The refurbishing of the discipline also led to the argument that “development involves profound historical, economic, and social change that must be studied as such through a methodology that reflects systemic change” [Ben Fine, “The New Development Economics” in Jomo K. S. and Ben Fine (eds.), The New Development Economics: After the Washington Consensus (New Delhi: Tulika, 2006), 1]. Over the years, the ideas related to development also inspired theories in other branches of economics. For a brief discussion, see Pranab Bardhan, “Economics of Development and the Development of Economics”, The Journal of Economic Perspectives 7, no. 2 (Spring, 1993), 129-42. A parallel flow of literature criticizing the ideas and ideologies of development as a force of post-colonial imperialism and as an instrument of discursive and institutional violence also continued to exist. For details see Wolfgang Sachs (ed.), The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power (London: Zed Books, 1992); Arturo Escobar, Encountering Development: The making and Unmaking of the Third World (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995); Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (eds.), The Post-Development Reader (London: Zed Books, 1997); and Aram Ziai (ed.), Exploring Post-development: Theory and Practice, Problems and Perspectives (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).
reality that it manages to invoke. There is also a temptation to neatly distribute the two sides of this contradiction – universal appeal and local specificities – between the two dimensions of the practice of modeling – representation and transformation. I am not saying that representation will always have to presume a universal appeal and transformation will always take stock of local specificities, or the opposite. In fact, in most cases, these two co-ordinates are interchangeably attributed these dimensions; but the common understanding is that, to tackle the issue of applicability of economic principles, and to estimate the feasibility of their truths, one is induced to make a clear and prosaic distinction between representation and change.

This is particularly true for some recent attempts to conceptualize a realm of “practice” in the context of “everyday economic transactions.” In his introduction to one such anthology, David Ruccio names three fields where the talks about diverse representations of the economy – its operational details, its interactions with other natural and social forces, its concepts and tools of analysis – are carried out: “within the official discipline of economics, in academic departments and research centers other than departments of economics within colleges and universities, and in activities and institutions outside the academy.”

Ruccio does not subscribe to a “positivist conception of representation” that presumes superiority of one type of economic representation over another because of its comprehensiveness or exactitude; his focus remains on the variety of descriptions and rationalities which seem to co-exist and influence our economic behaviors.

This is not a novel concern. We have seen earlier how scathingly Leijonhufvud has scolded the conservative section of the economic discipline for having lost touch with other disciplines and the actual world of business. It is also another way of mapping out the same outside which lies beyond the analytical grid of economic representation with its usual problems and contradictions.

---


14 *Ibid*, 6. Ruccio wants to explore the kind of knowledge that remains in comforting distance from the “headquarters of academic economics,” to be observed in everyday life of economic agents, untrained in the theories of supply and demand, but managing to do well in case of calculated enterprises (*ibid*, 5).

15 Most of these problems follow from the imagination of a formidable separation between the academic and everyday practices, ultimately giving an impression, perhaps inadvertently, that the relation between the two domains of economic representation is premised on a notion of difference which is universal and beyond theorization. It happens precisely because Ruccio adopts “representation” as an unproblematic device of epistemic inquiries. As Timothy Mitchell points out, the criticism of the economic discipline, and especially its neoclassical avatar, in terms of misrepresentation of the economy overlooks the nuances of its own construction and imagines that “the work of social science is to represent a material world external to itself” [Timothy Mitchell, “The Properties of Markets” in Donald Mackenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu (eds.), *Do Economists Make Markets?: On the Performativity of Economics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 244].
novelty is elsewhere. Alex Preda, writing about a similar domain of practical knowledge outside the academia, gives it an intriguing name – “vernacular.” Vernacular economics, as Preda puts it, refers to “heterogeneous sets of practices, know-how techniques, and rationalization procedures that help social actors make sense of their economic environment and of the economic consequences of their own actions.” Although it is held to be operative outside the purview of academic economics, the vernacular domain of practices is not entirely disconnected with a more professional version of the discipline. Preda believes that most academic theories are posterior to their vernacular counterparts and that the issues first raised in the vernacular domain are eventually appropriated by the academia for a more rigorous treatment.

Even though Preda chooses to designate the domain of practice with a historically loaded term such as “vernacular,” he situates its historicity within the academic and non-academic milieu of European knowledge centers. This Eurocentric attitude is a major problem for both Ruccio and Preda who, in spite of being quite earnest in delineating the alternative discourses, fail to historicize the moment of their separation from the world of academic orthodoxy. It is crucial to specify and explain the historical conditions of this separation; otherwise the concept of practice itself turns into a monolith, intuitively celebrating the mythical gap between concrete fields of empirical data and abstract models with hyperbolic assumptions. Also, as a consequence, the presumed hierarchy of the “outside” to the economic discipline in the paradigms of representational diversity remains unexplored. The chief

---


18 Sometimes the relation assumes the form of translation from a shabbier version of theories to more formalized ones; sometimes the functions of the two domains differ in accordance with their separate objects and principles. Preda himself upholds the opinion that “vernacular knowledge actively influences academic theories: among others, it provides them with rationalization devices, formulates competing explanatory models, and articulates interests that are later integrated into academic theories” (ibid, 355).

19 Preda’s own work concerns the advent of two of the most important theories in modern finance – options pricing theory and random walk hypothesis. For a long time it was believed that both theories appeared for the first time in the writings of Louis Bachelier in 1900, but recent scholarship has revealed that, in the 1860s and ’70s, in works by Jules Regnault and Henri Lefevre, the key elements of these theories were formulated. Preda insists that neither Regnault nor Lefevre “did actually write for an academic readership. They saw themselves as financial speculators. Their publications explicitly addressed investors, and their aim was to provide practical advice” (ibid, 353). Preda believes that there was a “popular science of financial investments” in nineteenth-century France which inspired the more formalized academic theories at the turn of the century. In this essay, he traces “the ways in which this vernacular science promoted a set of epistemic assumptions that were key with respect to a formalized theory of market efficiency” (ibid, 356).
Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore this “outside” in a particular history of its inception, to trace its footprints on a track that seems to escape the attention of most of its interlocutors – the colony. I argue that the colony occupies a specific location in relation to the reception of the economic discipline in its various forms and formalities, codes and protocols, musings and meanderings. This specificity is effected by certain modalities of translation and disseminated through certain norms of socialization. I intend to show in this thesis how the vernacular in this context emerges as a domain of interactions between these modalities and as a constitutive logic of these norms.

As my area of research, I look into some moments of “vernacularization” of the economic discipline in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal. It is imperative to situate this study in distinction with the earlier works that have dealt with the history of reception of the discipline in colonial India. I do not wish to follow the standard path of history of ideas maintained in the classic studies of Indian economic thought. The most noted of these works include B. N. Ganguly’s and Bhabatosh Datta’s books on economic thinking in India in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries respectively. These texts, though invaluable in their scholarship and thorough discussion of the evolution of an Indian version of economics, imagine a sort of unity of the oeuvre and consistency of thematic concerns distributed over long a period of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial time-space continuum. In fact, one of the objectives of my dissertation is to question the underlying logic of this continuity and attempt to explore how a distinct and standardized concept of “Indian economics” is possible to imagine in a backdrop of various negotiations and contestations hosted in the vernacular domain.

The other variety of economic history explains various social and political movements in colonial India in the context of the emergence of an Indian economy. Two of the most famous of these studies are Bipan Chandra’s Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India and Sumit Sarkar’s The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. In Chandra’s work, for example, the “economic history” of Indian nationalism operates against a thread of identitarian politics and, consequently, the economic itself is projected as an initiator and guarantor of socialization in a positive sense. On the other hand,

---


Sarkar’s discussion of the nationalist usurpation of economic concepts and categories focuses chiefly on the ideological aspects of economic nationalism and etches out the moments of cultural mobilization thereof. Both works engage critically with the foundation of economic nationalism in India but do not explore the construction of the concept of “economy” as part of these mobilizations or explain the ideas that came up during the movements in relation to the histories of the economic discipline. But more importantly, none of them interrogate the notions of the social that they assume to have followed from the movements in the realm of economic deliberations. In my thesis, I shall explore these very moments of conceptualization of the economic and the social in various registers of their manifestation and shall question the underlying logic of their interconnectedness and conversations.

The other important genre of economic history in the context of colonialism in India is the one which estimates the role and import of “Western” economic theories on Indian administrators. Eric Stokes’ *English Utilitarians and India*, Ranajit Guha’s *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, and S. Ambirajan’s *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India* represent the main texts in this genre. Though rich in detail and insights, these works concentrate primarily on the canonical texts in political economy and take stock of the range of influences on the administrative practices. Often they describe the networks through which these texts came to be appropriated by the colonial state in designing and deploying economic policies, but do not explain how these networks themselves were interwoven to delimit the range of ideas which were available to the policymakers. Moreover, from their shared assumption that most of these canons were internalized by the British administrators without any suspicion, modification, or displacement – especially in the contexts of various debates that were already taking place in the metropolitan centers about the applicability and moral justification of economic knowledge in the colonial conditions – emerges a functionalist narrative of the relationship between the Empire and its capacity of knowledge production. This narrative, comfortably linear and sometimes unduly hurried, denies any possibility of translation as a strategy of negotiating the discomfort with the seemingly universalist predilections of the science of political economy.

---

Another major problem with these histories of “economic policy” remains in the negligence – and sometimes negation – of the “other” side of the story: the modalities of reception of political economy by the native subjects of the British Empire. This approach attributes an undeserving agency to the “intending actors” in the colonial government and disavows the technologies of mediation adopted by the natives to come in terms with the growing importance of political economy within the administrative, pedagogical, and intellectual networks. The contending claim of this thesis is that the emergence of the vernacular as a space of these mediations cannot afford to lose sight of any side in this struggle for exegesis. Both the colonial masters and their native subjects were embroiled in the game of contested interpretations and calculated conformity, and none of them enjoyed any steady primacy over the other, either by intention or by accident.

This tension with the proper and justifiable modality of transmitting economic knowledge had been an instrumental element in colonial pedagogical networks, not only in India, but also in other parts of the world. In nineteenth-century Ireland, for example, the study of political economy in educational institutions was contested on the ground of “differences” in its conditions with those in England. With the alarming experience with the Great Famine in 1847, the universal claims of an English political economy came under suspicion throughout the middle of the century and the “anomaly” of the colony in a system of unilateral application led to a demand for an Irish political economy. On the other hand, Horace William Clift, a Baptist missionary whose book on political economy was published from the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta in 1835, identified the strength of the discipline precisely in its ability to thumb down all the traces of difference between the colony and the metropole. Even the title of his book suggests that one of the objectives of colonial pedagogy was to introduce a knowledge system which would strike out the regressive remainders of its barbaric past, riddled with signs of backwardness like the caste system: “there is scarcely a doctrine of political economy which is not a sharp weapon wherewith to strike Hinduism, and in the eye of reason, to overthrow it.” The force of his conviction in the role of the discipline in dissemination of a liberal education system gives a sense of almost physical violence, but his suggestion to spread education in political economy as a great equalizer and a carrier of the message

24 Ibid, 10.
26 Ibid, 46.
of “freedom” also brought into focus the participatory role that had to be played by the native readers as well: “but the Hindus must help themselves.”

Either scared of his threat to be struck and overthrown, or convinced by his faith in the liberating promise of political economy, the native readers did seem to have taken his suggestion seriously.

In 1849, Lokahitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh brought out a translation of Clift’s text in Marathi. Neeraj Hatekar, while writing a history of Marathi translations of economic texts, finds it “difficult to understand why Deshmukh chose to model his work on such an obscure writer.” This observation points to a typical problem with the conventional history of political economy which organizes and restrains itself in another model of inspiration – the model of an autobiography of the discipline. This autobiographical mode, while projecting the “high” canons as the only collectable pebbles on the shore of history of ideas, snips up any aberrational extension as “obscure” or “unnecessary.” Even the greats in the tradition of history of economics display the same tendency to overlook the so-called popular texts with less prestigious denomination.

As a result, the diverse and often contesting narratives of the “popularization” of the discipline become redundant, or worse, get reduced to a footnote to the main text of hero-worshipping.

This unselshconscous distrust of the popular is often shared by contemporary historians whose own works focus on popular texts in other areas. Manu Goswami’s Producing India, for example, provides a refreshing break in the conceptualization of Indian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explores the intellectual and administrative practices that helped re-imagination of the bound space of an Indian nation and economy through various spatiotemporal negotiations and ideologies of subject formation across global and regional coordinates. She conducts a brilliant study of “an unexplored archive of vernacular geographical and historical texts” to question the naturalness of national economy. However, in her chapter on the nationalist

---

27 Ibid.
imaginary of a bound space of Indian economy, she does not mention a single vernacular text on political economy.\textsuperscript{31} This creates a problem for an otherwise path-breaking endeavor. Her gesture of problematizing an “autonomous sociocultural domain,” unmediated by capital or colonialism, giving a sense of “untranslatability” of the indigenous, and her willingness to situate the vernacular practices within a “common, if asymmetrically structured social field” coproducing the colonial and the nationalist forms are undermined by the same faith in canonicity of the economic discipline.\textsuperscript{32} This unexamined presupposition finally leads to an unproblematized notion of the economic space awaiting intervention by strategies of vernacularization. Consequently, even after invoking the “contentious process of translation,” Goswami restricts the notion of translation to the “received worlds of value and meaning in colonial era.”\textsuperscript{33} It is impossible to theorize a politics of “reception” without admitting the possibility of an equivalence, and therefore, a structure or modality of translation. Now to track the vernacular domain in all its possibilities, one needs to clarify these systems of equivalence, study these modalities of translation in some detail.

I argue that the autobiographical “model” of the history of the discipline in the West deserves our attention in this regard – how the linearity and the comprehensiveness of canonical history of ideas determines the “treatment” of political economy in the colony; how the unproblematic appraisal of this history provides a model for writing history of the discipline in terms of its “application” and the incommensurability arising from concerns specific to the fields of its application. This division between the West and the colony in terms of theory and practice – the former assumed to be self-sufficient and stable, and the latter, either inspired, or at best, delineated by the “lack” of the disciplinary orthodoxy to explain and contain the whole of it – plots the vernacular and/or the popular, and hence the colony, in a simple and secure narrative of representation sanctioned by an undertheorized concept of the “outside.”

In his introduction to a collection of essays on vernacular history writing in India, Partha Chatterjee has brought our attention to “many shapes and forms” of the vernacular juxtaposed with the advent of “the new disciplinary practices of modern historiography.”\textsuperscript{34} These practices, endowed with the authoritarian principles of “rational causation and scientific methodology” and disseminated through

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 10.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 25.  
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{34} Partha Chatterjee, “Introduction: History in the Vernacular” in Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee (eds.), \textit{History in the Vernacular} (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008), 9.
pedagogical interventions like establishment of universities and publication of academic journals and monographs, defined the “space of the colonial modern.” Chatterjee argues that, historically, the vernacular existed as a category of “difference” in relation to this space, although the markers of this difference were not always as obvious as they seemed. The colonial modern had influenced much of the writings in vernacular by introducing a framework of formalization in terms of stylistic nuances and methodological standards. As a result, these writings disavowed their “original” charge of dissent and participated in the “formation of such modernity.” Chatterjee, however, refuses to call this body of writing vernacular history; he puts his bet on the existence of “a plethora of historical writings that might be called a mixture or hybrid” – a multifarious body of work that made use of pre-modern, early-modern, and even colonial modern discursive elements, and continued to disrupt the academic conventions of history writing in colonial India.

Though Chatterjee is talking specifically about vernacular histories, his arguments can be extended to other forms of vernacular knowledge as well, precisely because of two reasons. First, history as a discipline and also as a means of rationalization of colonial power provided the British with a meta-narrative of progressive differentiation. As Bernard Cohn suggests, the historiographic modality of colonialism in India codified and reinstituted the previous ruling practices in the country as part of its governmental enterprise. It also “involved the ideological construction of the nature of Indian civilizations,” producing an array of different and often conflicting histories, but governed by a logic of historicism which measured India’s progress in the same scale of historical development already experienced in the west. By the same token, historical discourses – both academic and vernacular – became a model for other disciplines aligned in the same logic of a “civilizing mission.” The case of political economy is particularly instructive in this regard. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was taught at the Indian universities as part of the history curriculum. It was only as late as in 1909 that the University of Calcutta introduced a separate honors course in political economy.

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 11.
37 Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.
39 Bhabatosh Datta, Indian Economic Thought, 5.
Secondly, like history, the other disciplines including political economy were also caught up in the same debates over the place of the vernacular in the designs of pedagogical reform. The question as to what should be the medium of government funded education caused much tension among the advocates of western education in the 1830s. Those who defended the plea for vernacular education insisted on its wider reach which would bring about social change and aid the government in its functioning. One of the most popular arguments was that vernacular education would reduce crime rate, as ignorance was held to be the principal cause of its high occurrence. It was also argued that it would dispel the “indifference” from people’s mind towards the “spirit and principles” of the colonial government. The opponents of this position pointed out the impracticality and costliness of a “national system” based on multiple languages; also their “crudeness” was thought to impede full expression of western concepts. Finally, even when the vernacularists conceded and Macaulay’s famous minute in 1835 officialized the use of English as the chief mode of government funded education, the importance of the vernacular did not recede. In many private schools, unaided institutes and learned societies, education in vernacular languages continued to supplement the anglicized system. It effected a proliferation of textbooks in these languages, most of which were translations of standard textbooks followed in English schools. In the second half of the nineteenth century, even textbooks in political economy started to appear. All these textbooks had one thing in common: although fashioned to cater to the needs of children in the colony, they were also set to emulate the principles of English education to a great extent.

As we have noted earlier, Chatterjee dismisses these writings in vernacular as singularly driven to contribute to the formation of the colonial modern and favors the hybrids that sought to trouble the academic conventions. The problem with the concept of “hybridity” is that it resists definition. Hence, there is a risk of its being reduced to a homogeneous totality if not interrogated at different moments of its disentanglement. The best thing about Chatterjee’s argument is that it foregrounds the structural logic of this hybrid vernacular and, by focusing on the “variety of practices” and the hierarchies among them, breaks down its self-image of absolute insubordination. However, at the end of the essay, Chatterjee organizes vernacular histories within a corpus which acted as “vehicles

41 Ibid.
for a range of critiques of modern academic history.” He lists few dichotomies through which this critique is realized: community memory and logic of the state, fabulous and enchanted indulgences and scientific rationality, local or regional aspirations and national or, perhaps, universal reason. In an almost celebratory note, he declares that the vernacular might not have rejected the “academic” practices completely, but they always succeeded in “marking their difference.”

This view also upholds the potential of an unmediated outside facilitated by a desire to identify “difference” as a primary element in the conception of the vernacular. It is my intention in this thesis to challenge the constitutive logic of this outside by disrupting the smooth movement of canonical history of the economic discipline in the West and questioning the framework of “representation” that produces and regenerates the “outside,” sometime as a potent field of intervention, and sometime as an unruly, uncharacterized, unmanageable anomaly that contains the sole promise of radical insubordination. Secondly, my objective is to disturb the historicist narrative of the colony as a passive site in the politics of reception by exploring the interlinked networks of mediation between a presumably Western science and the technologies of translation befitting the purpose of giving it a “suitable” form according to the local specificities. These networks are not autonomous, nor do they exist in a deterministic relation to the formalization of the social that is assumed to hold them together. By describing these networks in some detail and exploring the historical conditions of their operations, I hope to locate the colonial in relation to its conditioning as a repository of “difference” and underscore the various techniques of resolving and rearticulating this logic to the effect of instituting a governmental colonial state.

The history of vernacularization of political economy, therefore, cannot subscribe to the logic of chronological consistency as evinced in the histories of ideas mentioned earlier. It cannot simply reproduce the same narrative of systemic evolution of the discipline from the point of muddled confusion between economic and social institutions to the confident assertion of their complete separation. At the same time, it cannot replicate the intuitive logic of canonicity surfacing from reading of classical texts without any instance of displacement or disfiguration. Hence, as a counter-strategy, I concentrate primarily on the pedagogical networks of dissemination where the relationship between the rationale of circulation and the rationality of an untroubled history of ideas is blurred, specific, and mediated by concerns other than those determined within the

---

44 Ibid, 21.
representational frameworks of historicism. In this context, it is necessary to visit the works of Michel Foucault – especially his texts on the epistemic status of economics as a discipline and the genealogies of the figuration and the disfiguration of homo economicus as a universal carrier and custodian of economic rationality and how that rationality operates through what Foucault famously calls a “positive unconscious of knowledge.”46 This “positive unconscious” is not internal to the scientists or the participants of the economic or any other discourse, but instrumental to the rules of formation of the discourses ensuring their stability and unity and dispersing the effects of their realization in a particular epistemic arrangement. In Order of Things, for example, Foucault discusses how, in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, plotted alongside with the disciplinary matrices of the sciences of organism and the studies of grammatical system, the concept of labor was placed in a tabulated space of representational idioms. In the nineteenth century, however, a shift in the same concept was observed in the works of David Ricardo and others where the previously instituted stability in labor as a measure of value was upset by a logic of historicism and, as a result, labor evolved as the source of value through the energy, toil, and time of the laboring act. To demonstrate how the “positive unconscious” operates through disparate thoughts within the same episteme, Foucault explores how the notion of anthropological finitude conveyed by the historicist conception of labor was mitigated in classical political economy and its fiercest critique by Marx. If for Ricardo, this finitude inaugurated a climate of pessimistic futurism, for Marx, it bore a promise of revolutionary reorganization of history itself. But, as Foucault explains, both thoughts were part of “a same system of options” which “represents nothing more than the two possible ways of examining the relations of anthropology and History as they are established by economics through the notions of scarcity and labor.”47

It is evident that, once thought in terms of epistemic shifts and dispersal of “positive unconscious,” the conventional chronologies seem less stable and consistent than before, exposing various fault lines that refuse to be subdued by the demand for linearity of scientific progress. By the same logic, however, it is possible to broaden the horizon of these shifts already discussed and demonstrated in Foucault’s own works and the subsequent follow-ups in different fields of historical research. One interesting absence in Foucault’s histories of epistemic entanglements is that of the colony, although as Ann Laura Stoler suggests, there are less travelled avenues to his works and thinking which point to a dialogue with a “colonial order of things” through questions of sexuality, race, and pedagogical

and familial discourses in a colonial backdrop. In his class lectures at College de France, Foucault touches upon the questions of race and its various surreptitious adventures in the spectrums of American neo-liberalism, especially through reconceptualization of labor and the disciplinary developments in the field of genetics. Foucault here argues that, after the “discovery” of labor as the source of value in productive activities, the American neo-liberal thinkers propose to generalize this impulse even beyond the reach of economic actions and extend its application in supposedly noneconomic situations via the concept of “human capital.” The concept of human capital does not dwell on the mechanisms of production and exchange, but is premised on a theory of competitive choice where conceiving different alternative systems of distribution of scarce resources becomes the principal problematic of economic rationality. Hence, the concept of labor is redefined as an activity which allocates the means at hand to several fulfillments of desire. Consequently, wage which was previously defined as the payment to economic activities is now reformulated as a remuneration to capital that is “the set of all those physical and physiological factors which make someone able to earn this or that wage.” This is, in a sense, a retelling of the machinic idea of the human body: “labor comprises a capital, that is to say, it is an ability, a skill; as they say: it is a “machine.” Finally, this concept of human capital is realized in the act of consumption which is nothing but a way to refurbish and reenergize the machinic potential of the human body. Modern genetics provides precisely a design or a blueprint of this machine to predict the risks that may arise due to miscalculations in allocation of resources. Race is thus integral to this concept of capital as a marker of stability around which the mapping of the human is actualized in a dream of machinic perfection of post-war capitalism.

This development of the concept of human capital in American academia, as it seems, brings forth for the first time the connections between the physical dimension of labor and the machinic imaginaries of risk management. However, if we introduce the colony in this apparently smooth narrative of shifting epistemic orders, we encounter a parallel, if not antithetical, account where the chronologies of racial classification, physiological categorization, and the projection of the homo economicus as an agent of these reordering are somehow troubled and disrupted. As we shall see in

50 Ibid, 224.
51 Ibid.
this dissertation, the concept of “human capital” defined almost in the same sense and governed by similar impetuses of capitalization of risk appears at a different moment from the one described above, although it should be specified that this emergence was not predicated on the same logic of historicity dissected in Foucault’s work on American neo-liberalism. The point of this illustration is to show that, by using Foucault’s own methodology, it is possible to come upon quite different narratives of the same conceptual developments often described hastily as the only course of history in the regime of ideas. One objective of this dissertation is to thwart this hastiness and seek out the impure genealogies of certain concepts and ideas in a specifically colonial framework.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part, I undertake to investigate the conceptual framework of representation and its role in determining the course of an evolutionary history of ideas in case of the economic discipline. The purpose of this part is to contest the standard practice of studying the politics of reception of the economic discipline in the colony in terms of displacements from the “original” texts in the West and showing how these displacements resulted from “difference” in conditions in the both domains of knowledge production. This practice, however, fails to trouble the already settled notions of “displacement” and “difference” and neglect to explore the modalities of translation as central to the problematic of vernacularization. In contrast, I shall attempt to relate these questions to the contemporary debates in the field of methodology of economic investigations and introduce a conceptual framework which will help exploring the politics of reception of the discipline in the colony in new light.

In my first chapter of the dissertation, I review a host of literature on the methods of economic analysis and follow the debates that have been attentive to questions of economic representation and validity of the established modes of knowledge production within the discipline. It will be evident from the discussion that, over the last century, the concept of economic model has become the most popular and powerful mode of economic inquiries and most of the concerns about the authenticity of economic representation were addressed to situate the role of the models in relation to the world that they describe and study. By exploring a variety of literature on economic models, I contend in this chapter that the primary objective of an economic model is not to represent the world that it describes, but to order, regulate, and change it according to its own structural dynamics. In this context, I introduce the theory of “sociotechnical agencement” by Michel Callon who, unlike the sociologists of economics who insist on the influence of social relations and institutions on economic theorization, is in the opinion of conflating the world of theory and the so-called actual
world of its application. According to his theory of “economic performation,” economic theory does not only explain the world under its purview, but it also contributes in its formation through an assemblage of sociotechnical interventions, simultaneously and symmetrically activated by human and non-human elements.

One major problem with this formulation is that it does not acknowledge any possibility of critique, as the critique – or any competing view, so to speak – is also part of the assemblage, and hence is not susceptible to analysis. Some identify the root of this problem in the decision to extend the framework of “actor-network-theory” of Bruno Latour to the orbit of economics which is predominantly a social science and not a natural science. According to Latour and Callon who co-authored one of the earliest manifestos of this academic movement – the tendency to explain everything as socially constituted leaves out the “social” itself untroubled. They offer an alternative definition of the social as “trails of associations” resulting from mediations between different political and epistemic domains. Although, in the beginning, even in Latour and Callon, there were attempts to project the asymmetries in these acts of mediations – or “translation”52 in their framework – later they shifted the focus from this concern and concentrated on the symmetrical distribution of agency between human and non-human elements within an social assemblage. I maintain in this chapter that the shift of focus from the asymmetries in the social assemblages follows from conceptualizing “translation” in a restrictive framework which does not take account of the colony. Ironically, this exclusion permits them to adopt an overtly generalized framework of mediation leading to diluting the specificity of the acts of translation in various geopolitical locations of knowledge production. As a solution to this problem, one needs to locate the notion in its specific context in the colony and consider the implications of this relocation. I shall propose an alternative framework from the works of Mary Morgan and Marcel Boumans who choose to study the practice of “modeling” in its material conditions. Here I understand translation as the incorporation of a “metaphor” in a physical or diagrammatic model – for example, when the analogy between circulation of any liquid and circulation of money in an economy is given a concrete, physical dimension by designing machinic structures with specific shapes and measurements. I shall

52 “By translation,” Callon and Latour write, “we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force”[Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, “Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So” in K. Knorr-Cetina and A. V. Cicourel (eds.), Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-sociologies (Boston, London, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 279]. I shall discuss this concept in detail in my first chapter.
argue that, historically, this framework is able to address both the concerns of applicability of Western categories and theories in a foreign condition by foregrounding the asymmetries that may take flight from the conflicts and contestations between material constraints and commitments to the “original” theoretical arguments.

The other advantage of choosing this conceptual framework of “modeling” is that it helps finding new genealogies of the economic discipline even in the West. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I shall offer a reading of the history of the category of rent different from the standard narratives which map the development of the theory of differential rent from a Ricardian framework to a more socially mediated category of analysis in John Stuart Mill as a straightforward account of the separation of the natural and social domains of analysis in the context of nineteenth-century political economy. I shall demonstrate how this history of separation is not as smooth and uncontested as it seems and is infested with manifold attempts of translation between the two domains. In Ricardo, the theory of differential rent indicated a moment of intervention in the social reality of England of that time and also inaugurated the emergence of the economic expert. At the turn of the century, the narrative took another spin when, in the hands of John Bates Clark, the famous American economist who conceived “marginal productivity of capital and labor” and came up with a “scientific” theory of distribution, “differential rent” itself became a metaphor in his theory of modeling and provided a more solidly defined figure of an economic expert. I argue that this exercise proves the importance of the conceptual framework of “modeling” in the context of writing economic histories and foregrounds the centrality of metaphors in the narratives of scientificity of the economic discipline. It also breaks down the conventional practice of studying the colonial experience of political economy in the light of developments in the Western academia and instates the centrality of translational frameworks in the Western histories of the discipline.

In the second part, I draw attention to three distinct moments in the history of the vernacularization of the discipline in colonial Bengal. These three moments are not connected by an impetus of historical evolution but situated in a structural framework of translational modalities delineating the pedagogical and governmental questions of applicability and demonstrability of economic reason. The purpose of this exercise is to spell out and analyze the centrality of the constant traffic between these modalities and the tension about the feasibility of economic knowledge in foreign conditions on parts of both the colonial state and its native subjects.
We shall see in the first chapter in the second part – the third in the dissertation – that the location of political economy in the nineteenth-century colonial pedagogy in India was highly contested and constantly mobile. There were confusions among the British policymakers whether the natives were suited for an instruction in a highly advanced subject like political economy. At the same time, even the rationale of teaching the discipline at the Haileybury College for prospective East India Company officials was questioned by many. With English being officialized as the medium of instruction in the 1830s, a dearth in proper vernacular textbooks in the discipline was felt, but mostly no action was taken because of the missionaries involved in vernacular education were not interested in teaching the “godless” subject of political economy. One notable exception in this regard was Clift whose book was translated in Marathi in the middle of the century. After the Education Despatch in 1854, few textbooks in vernacular languages started to appear. The central focus of this chapter is rested on three of these textbooks in Bengali: one of them was translated from the famous Irish educationist Richard Whately’s textbook for children and the others got their inspiration from many sources starting from Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill. By a close reading of these books, I shall demonstrate how a modality of translation was operative in the second half of the nineteenth century where the equivalence between “illustrations” from the original and translated texts produced curious displacements and defined the vernacular domain on the basis of an exchange-based sociality grounded in the notion of the family.

By the end of the century, however, a shift in the perception about the status of political economy in colonial pedagogy was already being felt. It was now being taught at the University level and the proper methods of its teaching and learning were being discussed among both the British officials and the native intellectuals. In the fourth chapter of my thesis, I attempt to track a modality of translation which was distinct from the earlier modality in terms of its insistence on an organicist concept of social reconfiguration. In a sense, this modality was in continuation from the turn of the century, but its most consolidated form appeared in the Bengali journal *Arthik Unnati* – “Economic Progress” in the 1920s. Edited by the prolific Bengali intellectual Benoy Kumar Sarkar, this journal sought to introduce a new methodology of economic investigations into the social reality of the country in relation to the happenings in the outer world. Sarkar’s theories of “life,” “body,” “research,” and “practice” initiated a double movement of translation between experience and information in the pages of the journal and in his own and colleagues’ writings. A new modality of translation was introduced – the experiential modality of equivalence – which tried to connect the
economic with the biological by adopting the role of a proxy state and bringing about social reform by reaching out physically to the interiors of Bengal. The chapter ends with another participant in this modality of equivalence – the noted economist and sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee – who proposed a recasting the standard theories of orthodox economics in accordance to the developments in the fields of biological research and energetics. I discuss Mukerjee’s theories of redistribution of energy and physiological justice in some details to point at the moments of the so-called “illiberal impulse” in this new framework.

In the fifth chapter of my thesis, I explore another modality of translation in the anthropometric writings of Prashanta Chandra Mahalanobis, the chief architect and guardian of economic planning in postcolonial India. Published in the nineteen twenties, these writings were quite distant from his later works which paved the advent of a developmental narrative for a newly independent India. However, in this chapter, I argue that these writings were hardly incidental to his scheme of introducing statistics as a metadiscourse of specialist knowledge and relocated his own position as an expert for all seasons including “developing India.” Mahalanobis did this by finalizing a separation between the biological and the social/economic through a set of technical apparatuses which he developed in his writings on the racial foundations of caste configurations in Bengal. Previously, in the anthropometric surveys conducted by the colonial state, the “scientific” knowledge about castes was achieved by measuring certain biological features of the native populations and classifying them according to “universal” racial profiles for the sake of governmental interventions. Mahalanobis came up with a different strategy to reinstate the same motivation of intervention by conceiving a reverse movement of translation. In spite of translating races into castes as done by the former surveyors, he translated castes into races within a modality of spatial equivalence and conceived what still is considered by many his greatest contribution to modern statistics, the theory of Mahalanobis Distance. I shall show in this chapter how this paradoxical reversal of a translational framework was achieved by a conflation of two different registers of population – the governmental and the statistical categories of the same. This chapter may seem a little out of place in a dissertation on the vernacularization of the economic discipline, but I contend that these writings played an instrumental role in preparing a scheme for de-vernacularization of the discipline. This opposite movement was necessary to douse the risk of illiberalism already so potently appearing in the vernacular domain through various transactions between the biological and the economic.
Mahalanobis was able to displace this risk with the statistical notion of randomness and initiated a process of sanitization of the progressive history of the postcolonial state.

It should not be deduced from the above summary that I am trying to describe certain breaks in the chronology of vernacularization of the economic discipline. In fact, the chronology of vernacularization is as jumbled up as were the various networks through which it was dispersed. Radhakamal Mukerjee, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, and Prashanta Chandra Mahalanobis published their works around the same time in the nineteen twenties. Even after the disconnection proposed by Mahalanobis in the twenties, Sarkar wrote a monograph on sociology of population at the wake of the Second World War where he described the potential for a eugenic revolution in India. The purpose of this dissertation has never been to produce a narrative of continuity in these breaks, overlaps, contestations, and subliminal agreements. Against the grain of a typically comprehensive history of ideas, I only want to keep track of these convergences and divergences, continuities and discontinuities, conflations and displacements. The metaphorical image of the “track” is perhaps more appropriate to describe the theme of this project. Often perceived from a distance, two parallel tracks seem to have converged at the horizon. On closer inspection, this image mocks back and the illusion starts to crumble. Sometimes, however, the apparently parallel tracks are really a single line: once giving impression of divergence, but now lying in a state of determinate singularity. The vernacular tracks of the economic discipline have a similar propensity to meet at the horizon of canonical appropriation. This dissertation is an attempt to think otherwise.