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Women, Economics and History

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## Women, Economics and History: Diversity within Europe

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### *Full text*

- 1 Since its beginnings, the economic discipline has been characterized by an androcentric vision that has had two central consequences: on the one hand, the invisibilization of women as epistemological subjects, that is, as creators of economic thought; and on the other hand, the invisibilization of women as objects of study, leaving out of the economic analysis many of their productive activities and, especially, those related with social reproduction (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021). This special issue of *Æconomia / History, Methodology, Philosophy*, final outcome of a call for papers launched in January 2021, tries to contribute to the scholarship, from various feminist and gender perspectives, in both ways: by recovering the ideas of women economists silenced by history; and by reconstructing the analysis of women as workers and entrepreneurs in varied European contexts.
- 2 While recognizing the importance and urgent need for an inclusive global perspective on the topic of women in the history of economic facts and ideas, this issue is focused on Europe, for three reasons. First, surprisingly there are as yet no historical works on women, economics and the economy devoted to this geographical area, and, in general, the economic thought of Europe seen as a whole has been neglected.<sup>1</sup> Second, we, as editors of this special issue, are scholars based at European institutions and our work concerns this region in one way or another. We simply know this context better than other contexts. As much as we would not want to be perceived as perpetuating Eurocentrism in academic scholarship, we equally would not want to display dilettantism in attempts to ‘go global’ or



‘non-European’ without the competence to do so. However, we very much hope that scholars will continue exploring the topic of women in economics in other contexts and from other perspectives. Finally, and related to the previous point, our initial intention was to show diversity within Europe and explore its richness beyond the Western core. Even though we have succeeded in this only to some extent, we believe that the papers included here discuss the involvement of women in economic research, economic practices and activism in contexts diverse enough to give an initial overview and to be a promising starting point for further scholarship on different European realities. The contributions cover a wide time span, taking its starting point in the Enlightenment (the first paper starts its analysis with a factory operating in the 18th century), up to recent history (the last paper extends through the last decades of 20th century). They belong to the realms of economic history, history of economic thought, history of methodology and methodology itself. Let’s summarize the content of the eleven articles included in this special issue, before we move on to present our considerations.

## 1. Overview of the Papers

- 3 The detailed reconstruction through archival research of the situation of working women in Italian factories in the 18th and 19th centuries, carried out by Donatella Strangio, shows that even though women “were considered more suitable for a job that required attention, precision and manual skill” (p. 392), their treatment was worse in terms of wages, job conditions and chances of improvement.
- 4 The paper by Charlotte Le Chapelain and Herrade Baijot is a precious methodological and historiographical contribution discussing the reasons for the invisibility in the narrative on women entrepreneurs active in 19th century Europe, and reflecting on the methodology currently adopted in order to make them finally visible. In their review of the literature on women entrepreneurship in the nineteenth century, the authors found evidence disproving “the hypothesis of the withdrawal of women from the business sphere after the eighteenth century” (p. 405).
- 5 Three women politically active in 19th century France are the protagonists of the paper by H  l  ne P  rivier and Rebecca Rogers: the socialist Flora Tristan (1803-1844), the social-liberal Julie Daubi   (1824-1874), and the liberal Cl  mence Royer (1830-1902). They are not unknown, as they have been studied by feminist and gender historians, but they are neglected by historians of economic thought. The authors consider these women’s ideas within the political context and the economic debates, reconstructing their network, their reception and their heritage.
- 6 The article authored by Julia W  lardczyk and Anna Zachorowska discusses the legacy of the Polish economist and feminist Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska (1860-1934). Despite the fact that she was a university professor and the author of methodological, historical, theoretical and empirical works, and even of an autobiography, Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska has been forgotten. As an economist, she wrote about many issues, of which the authors of the paper select a few (the economic aspects of socialism, the role of the state, the woman question, demography, and the future of the economic system) in order to compare her standing with that of the more famous Polish economist Rosa Luxemburg.
- 7 The French liberal *Soci  t   d’  conomie politique* is the institution in which Nathalie Sigot looks for the presence of women economists. She analyses in particular the figure of Mathilde M  liot (1862 -post 1914), a journalist specialized in financial matters who played an important role in the *Soci  t  *. As a feminist, she fought against the conservative views of the liberal economists; as a financial analyst she struggled to enter the Stock Exchange, and participated in the debates on banking as an author of several books on the topic.

- 8 The contribution of Marianne Johnson and Denise Robson is devoted to the Swedish economist Anna Bugge Wicksell (1862-1928). Beyond reconstructing Wicksell's position on the intersection of gender issues with the economics of the population question, the authors offer an opportunity to reflect on the relation of women economists with their academic husbands, the impact of their writings and their activism, and the way their ideas were transmitted to the next generation, in this case to Alva Myrdal (1902-1986).
- 9 The economist Elizabeth van Dorp (1872-1945) is dealt with in the article written by Erwin Dekker and Willem Cornax. The first woman to obtain an academic position in the Netherlands, and to head a political party in parliament, as well as being a representative of the Austrian school, she wanted to improve "the position of women within the family, to make them less dependent on men and to allow them to develop their own, distinct, role and individuality" (p. 600).
- 10 Harald Hageman is the author of the paper on Louise Summer (1889-1964), a Czechoslovakian citizen born in Vienna, who lived in Austria, Switzerland and the United States. The first woman to receive a doctoral degree "summa cum laude", she was an expert in history of economic thought, a free-lance journalist, a multi-lingual translator and an international mediator, but "despite her great scholarly merits [she] never got a permanent academic position" (p. 618)
- 11 Four generations of female economists in Germany (1895-1961) are presented in the paper authored by Elisabeth Allgoewer. Allgoewer's rich analysis presents their biographies and research in the context of the country's political, economic, theoretical, institutional, and cultural sphere. It shows the influence of the historical school and of the idea of "motherliness" (p. 632) for the pioneers of the first generation, as well as the effects of World War I on the participation of women in seminars and lectures. The developments of the discipline in the Weimar years, and the exclusion of women from academic careers during the National Socialist era, violently marked the third generation of women studying economic and policy issues, whereas the ordoliberal orientation permeated the work of women scholars after World War II.
- 12 Finally, the last paper by Marta Sistelo and Pedro Teixeira studies the situation of women economists in Portugal in the years from 1980 to 1999. Using the official data on PhD students and their doctoral theses, the authors reconstruct a map of the first generation of Portuguese women completing doctorates in economics, and analyse the themes tackled in their dissertations.

## 2. Theoretical Perspective

- 13 When we launched this special issue and research program, we intended to stimulate the reconstruction of the diverse historical paths of the many European realities that have produced different interrelations among women, economics and history. This reconstruction involves the investigation on the situation of women in the economy and in economics within the contexts of their different countries, regions and periods, and as influenced by political events and processes. Contributors to the special issue mostly adopt this theoretical perspective. In the papers we find the reforms of the ecclesiastical state in the 18th century and the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19th century; we find the financial innovations introduced in France in the 1910s, the impact of World War I on women's work, the political transformation of Europe after WWI (such as Poland's independence in 1918), the Swedish interwar social reform movements, and the Dutch protestant movement of the Remonstrants; we find the upheavals of the republic in Germany, from the Great War to the Weimar years, then from the National Socialist era and its racist legislation to the division of Germany after World War II; we find the end of

the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974 and the role played by the country's joining the European Economic Community.

14 The essays also show that the economic actions and thoughts of women in the different European countries were closely connected with their intellectual traditions. We learn about the mercantilist culture of the Papal State, French utopian socialism, the liberal belief in natural order, Marxism, Schmoller's historicism, Spencer's evolutionism, the French school of economics, the *Methodenstreit*, marginalism, the Austrian school, the ordoliberal tradition of the Freiburg School, and influences from American Institutionalism. All these pages make it evident that the approach adopted by the women studied was deeply rooted in the debates and the schools of thought of their time.

15 A recurrent aspect in most of the contributions is also the history of the institutionalization of the disciplines studying economic issues (political economy, law, economics) in different European countries, obviously highlighting the limits on access to formal education for women and on their career as economists. We learn that after 1848 "the universities of the Netherlands slowly and somewhat grudgingly opened their doors for female students" (p. 584); that Julie Daubié was "the first woman to pass the baccalaureate in 1861" (p. 454); that Anna Bugge Wicksell was "only the fifth Norwegian woman to earn a school-leaving certificate in 1885" (p. 559); that Elisabeth van Dorp did not become a lecturer at the university of Utrecht until 1919; that in 1910 Louise Sommer at the University of Vienna "had the status of an extramural student since women were admitted to the law faculty as regular students only from 1919 onwards" (p. 606); we find that the lack of girls' preparatory schools in Sweden drastically reduced the possibility of university studies for women, that "in Germany, women could attend universities as regular students only in the twentieth century" (p. 625), and that in Portugal before the 1950s "less than 10 women were awarded a doctoral degree in all fields" (p. 668).

### 3. Methodological Considerations

16 The fact of the exclusion of women from formal education has important consequences on the methodology to be adopted in order to identify their contributions to economics. If women had no reason to write academic essays, how can we find them? How can we reconstruct their ideas? Many protagonists of our special issue used to write, so a textual analysis is often adopted by the authors to examine their thought. In other cases, the authors adopt different methodologies in order to overcome the usual difficulties in finding information on the women of the past, including the fact that women were often hidden from statistics, which for the most part were non-gendered. Some of the contributors rely on archival research, as in the case of the Italian *manifatture*. Archives, public and private, are also the basis for the methods proposed in order to identify entrepreneurs, as well as for the analysis of the correspondence of women with leading economists. Another way to identify the women dealt with in this issue is by broadening the definition of an economist, as in the cases of Flora Tristan, Julie Daubié and Clémence Royer. The minutes of economists' meetings (the *Société d'économie politique*), book reviews and translations also proved to be productive sources. Some authors follow the strategies adopted by the women themselves in order to reach a female audience, i.e. the strategy of writing extra-academic texts, such as poems (Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne), travel commentaries (Flora Tristan), articles in the press (Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska and Anna Bugge Wicksell), and radio addresses or interviews (Alva Myrdal). Sometimes, women's ideas are deduced from their experiences: this is the case of the women who, in the 19th century, "contributed to the industrialization process and occupied key positions as investors and entrepreneurs" (p. 405).

## 4. Main Topics

- 17 What were the economic topics tackled by the women discussed by our authors? Flora Tristan, Julie Daubié and Clémence Royer wrote about the workers' union and tax policy, using applied economics and an international perspective on the organization of workers; Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska conducted demographic analyses; Mathilde Méliot specialized in financial matters; Louise Sommer was an expert in Austrian cameralism, trade policy and economic methodology; statistical studies characterized the works of two generations of German female economists; Charlotte von Reichenau was a business cycle theorist, while for the Portuguese women PhDs, the preferred topics were applied micro and labour/public economics. In many cases their interest in economic questions was tied up with their involvement in women's movements: "Women's choices of fields of study at German universities in the early 20th century [were in line with the] sentiments that dominated the women's movement" (p. 633); Flora Tristan, Julie Daubié and Clémence Royer wrote about women's education and work; Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska examined the woman question from 1897; Anna Bugge Wicksell and Alva Myrdal intertwined the problem of population with that of gender equality, while Elizabeth van Dorp mainly "argued for a re-appreciation of the home and care activities that many women performed in their social circles and jobs" (p. 587). The close link with women's organizations and struggles is one of the possible reasons why many articles in this issue are devoted to the 19th century (Becchio, 2020).
- 18 The reason why the authors chose certain figures is mainly due to the latter's exclusion from the canon, despite having received considerable recognition during their lifetime: for example, Flora Tristan, Julie Daubié and Clémence Royer were well considered as economists and their books were reviewed; Elizabeth van Dorp achieved "a respected position" (p. 581) within the profession; Louise Sommer's work on cameralism was "well received in the contemporary literature" (p. 613); Charlotte von "Reichenau's research ... was highly acknowledged" (p. 648). Their impact on policy was also notable: Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska was a public intellectual and activist; Anna Wicksell and Alva Myrdal had an influence on social reformers; Elisabeth Liefmann-Keil "was a highly esteemed policy consultant" (p. 654). Yet despite these acknowledgments, their names have been forgotten. Why has their legacy vanished? The authors of the papers find different answers to this question: some figures were obscured by others (such as Marguerite Durand for Mathilde Méliot and Rosa Luxemburg for Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska), as if there was no room for two women of the same period in the same country; for some (like Louise Sommer) the language barrier may have been the reason why "the knowledge of her works was not transferred to subsequent generations" (p. 619); some have gone unrecognized because they did not work on economic theory, but on practical and gender issues, or because they only wrote for the popular press (like Anna Bugge Wicksell); some became invisible due to the "separate sphere" (p. 409) ideology (as in the case of the female entrepreneurs in the 19th century). The historical reconstruction of traditions is a very difficult task in women's studies (Laurenzi and Mosca, 2021), however, there are some examples of transmission that the papers in the special issue have successfully identified, such as the process of women's emancipation from the first to the second Italian *manifatture*; the legacy passed from the Wicksells to the Myrdals in Sweden; the courses held by the first generation of female academics that the next generations were able to attend in Germany.

## 5. Further Perspectives



19 Historians of economic thought have already dealt with the methodology to be adopted for the identification of women economists of the past (Madden, 2019; Rostek, 2021), as well as with the difficulties of transmitting the names of women economists (from Dimand et al., 1995 to Kuiper, 2022). The distinctiveness of this special issue lies in the fact that its papers, being focused on diversity within Europe, offer the possibility of providing useful material for the development of further analyses in comparative terms: for example, we could consider the important role played by the Swiss Universities, which allowed women to study (Zurich in the cases of the Polish economists Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska and Rosa Luxemburg, Basel in the case of Louise Summer), or the comparison with the London School of Economics, which admitted women from its establishment in 1895, and with “the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne [which made] no distinction based on gender” (Mélot, quoted p. 535). We could study the friendship of Helene Simon with Beatrice Webb, who in turn inspired many women, like Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne; we could reflect on the fact that in Germany “during the Weimar years many economists ... tried to catch up with the developments ... in the Anglo-American world” (p. 626). These are only a few examples of the many comparisons that, triggered by the papers published in this special issue of *Œconomia / History, Methodology, Philosophy*, could be further scrutinized to investigate a still largely unexplored terrain. We hope that the research we present here will be an encouragement for further studies to be undertaken in different directions: first, by focusing on the complexity of other, less studied European countries, not covered in this special issue; second, by working on the inter-European comparisons among the heterogeneous national situations; third, by confronting, from a global perspective, non-European traditions in historical studies on women economists.

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## Notes

1 A recent attempt for a history of European economic thought is in Magliulo (2022).

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**Are there Alternative Traditions in Public Choice? An Introduction** [Full text]

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*By this author*

**Mariana Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy***

[Full text]

Published in *Œconomia*, 10-2 | 2020

**Introduction** [Full text]

Introduction

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