

BOOK REVIEW

Edith Kuiper, *A Herstory of Economics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 256 pp., \$29.95 (paperback). ISBN: 9781509538430.

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This book is the very first explicit *herstory* of economics. There are several recent herstories in other disciplines, including in gender studies, music, education, and politics, with selective titles like *Modern HERstory: Stories of Women and Nonbinary People Rewriting History* (2018), *The Social Life of a Herstory Textbook* (2020), or *Herstory—Histoire(s) des féminismes* (2021). However, building on recent historiography on women economic thinkers, Edith Kuiper remains the first historian of economics to have seriously attempted to explain the development of economic thinking uniquely through the perspectives of “a long line of women” who wrote about economic topics, theories, insights, and their experiences. What makes this book even more impressive is that it was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The world was paralyzed, but Kuiper found the strength to consolidate and systematize all of her teaching notes from her history of economics courses, along with years of discussion and research with her students at the State University of New York, New Paltz, and her colleagues at the International Association for Feminist Economics. Faced with a volume like this, we must sincerely thank Kuiper for her commitment over several decades, because of which we now enjoy a much fuller picture of the different characters who contributed to economic thinking, the debates in which they participated, the personal struggles they endured, and the interest of their work.

Recent historiography on women and economics in the history of economics mobilizes different approaches, and Kuiper acknowledges the influence of these on her book. They comprise biographical studies (Dimand, Dimand, and Forget 2000, 1995); books or articles in specific fields, including classical political economy, home economics, and feminist economics (Madden and Dimand 2022); studies of individual contributions; studies of institutions, including research centers, journals, and societies; and also historical reconstructions of different periods, focusing on women and economics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rostek 2021; Perdices de Blas and Gallego Abaroa 2007). Expressing her sense of debt to her students, Kuiper has conceptualized *A Herstory of Economics* as a textbook to support teaching. For this reason, she has chosen to secure accessibility by organizing the material into nine chapters that capture themes across the long period of 1700 to 2020. These are: “The Emergence of Political Economy” (Chapter 1); “Power, Agency, and Property Rights” (Chapter 2); “Education” (Chapter 3); “Women’s Relation to Wealth: Capital, Money, and Finance” (Chapter 4); “Production” (Chapter 5); “Distribution” (Chapter 6); “Consumption” (Chapter 7); “Government Policies” (Chapter 8); and “Findings, Feminist Economics, and Further Explorations” (Chapter 9).

There is no doubt in my mind that this book will be an essential resource for any teacher who is serious about exploring with their students more inclusive versions of history. My remaining comments now deal primarily with what I hope that additional herstories might bring to our discipline and to its teaching, to build further on Kuiper's approach and to continue to support our students.

For our teaching and research in the history of economics, it would have been helpful for Kuiper to provide an understanding of herstories in the social sciences, and to draw attention to the fact that this word game and its emerging status make sense only in an anglophone tradition. Etymologically the word "history" has no connection with the possessive pronoun "his." The term "herstory" is a neologism that works only in English since the word "history"—from the Ancient Greek word ἱστορία, or more directly from its Latin derivative *historia*, meaning "knowledge obtained by inquiry"—is etymologically unrelated to "his." For example, *histoire* in French and *historia* in Spanish do not include the male possessive "his" as "history" does in English. In the anglophone world, a "herstory" is written from a feminist perspective and it now emphasizes the role of women, LGBTIQ+ people, children, elders, and other characters whose thoughts, lives, or problems are not generally represented in conventional historiography, which has mostly told history as his-story—i.e., from the male or masculine point of view.

This could have been an interesting backstory to Kuiper's book. The term originated, and became popular, during the 1970s mainly in the US. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Robin Morgan (1970) was the first to employ it in her 1970 book *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. Joan Scott (1998, p. 41) argues that this "neologism" was created to designate the interdisciplinary courses offered in US universities that introduced studies of women from the past to serve as an example for students influenced by the women's liberation movement.

Since its creation, the term "herstory" has spread. Just as feminism arrived comparatively late to economics (Orozco Espinel and Gomez Betancourt 2022), herstories have also been slow to appear in our discipline (Rostek 2021). In this sense, it would have been interesting to hear Kuiper's account of the historiography of herstory, and this absence was missed.

Another important origin of herstories has been developed by bell hooks, a key thinker who fought to make visible the intersectional injustices experienced by Black women (Hooks 1994, 2003). In 1999, bell hooks wrote:

Feminist scholars, and this includes black women, were the ones who resurrected "herstory," calling attention to patriarchal exclusion of women and thus creating the awareness that led to greater inclusion. Even though I began my teaching in Black Studies, the courses I taught that were always packed with students (I had to turn students away) were those focused on women writers. The feminist challenge to patriarchal curriculum and patriarchal teaching practices completely altered the classroom. (Hooks 2003, p. 4)

However, Kuiper's purpose in this book is focused on the intersectional aspects of exclusion, because her book primarily follows the perspective of the feminist scholars of the 1970s, denouncing the dominance of male authors in the traditional historiography of economics.

It would also have been helpful for Kuiper to consider why the popularity of mainly White herstories in the 1970s and 1980s disappeared from debates across the 1990s and 2000s, only to reappear more recently. Why did this happen? Expressing both earnestness and humor, “herstory” was blazoned across 1970s t-shirts and gadgets, and it was discussed within anglophone academic circles. The question that we would like to understand is why herstories were important in the 1970s and then disappeared from the debates and came back recently. This backstory would have provided a political contextualization for Kuiper’s book, which I’m sure would be very interesting to students and colleagues.

It might also have made sense to try to address some of the criticisms that have been directed to herstories, so that Kuiper could make the case for their value even more strongly. First, Richard Dawkins described his criticism in *The God Delusion*, arguing that “the word history has no etymological connection with the masculine pronoun” (Dawkins 2016, p. 140). Second, Devoney Looser (2000) has criticized the concept of herstory for overlooking the contributions that some women made as historians before the twentieth century. Third, Christina Hoff Sommers has emerged as a prominent detractor of the concept of herstory. She outlined her opposition in her 1994 book *Who Stole Feminism?* In it, she delineates a division between two ideological camps: equity feminism and what she terms “gender feminism.” Sommers argues that equity feminists advocate for equal legal rights for both genders, whereas gender feminists aim to address historical gender-based inequalities.

Kuiper explained the motivations behind the book—first, as part of a larger project to rebalance the role of cis-women economic writers and cis-women economists (in the UK and the US) in the history of economics. Her second motivation is to increase our understanding of the works of little-known scholars, particularly some feminist economists. This choice required more explanation, because it raises the question as to why she decided to promote the work of some feminist economists and not also women who did not necessarily deal with feminist issues, including some Marxist economists, some development economists, or authors working in a subfield of economics in which there are fewer women known, such as macroeconomics or monetary economics. The third and fourth motivations are part of the numerous current research programs to read the history of economics through the lenses of gender or feminist economics and to restate the contribution of some women economists.

As for the outline and content, Kuiper’s is a very analytical approach that emphasizes several main themes or topics in the history of political economy. I would like to raise two constructive questions, the first about the role of the economic thinkers who discussed these topics, and the second about the very different contexts in which these questions were discussed.

The so-called narrative about-face and the importance of identifying names in historiography began in the 1970s (Aurell and Cardona 2005), thanks to historians like Harry Ritter and Leopold von Ranke, who were pioneers of scientificism in history. They had previously recognized that it is primarily personalities who move history: “Universal tendencies alone do not decide the outcome of history, they always require the great personalities to bring them into play” (Ritter 1986, p. 19). In the current stage of the history of economics, we continue to observe histories of well-known male economists. So, it is important to seek even more plurality, including new and upcoming authors, from different parts of the world. Hence, we need to know the names of women and

LGBTQA+ people who have contributed to economics in their own contexts. One potential problem with an analytical presentation by topics is that it makes it more difficult to identify the women economists themselves and the distinct character of their work.

The second issue concerns the difficulties, for a student audience, of jumping from Jane Austen (1777–1817) to financialization in India in 2000, thereby intermingling periods and contexts. I worry that students may find the thematic approach a little confusing. Kuiper's book covers a very long historical period. The justification of the choice of authors under each major theme is not entirely clear. Not only that, the work of some (young) historians of herstory approaches have not been incorporated. These are mostly scholars not based in the US/UK, including Simona Pisanelli (on Sophie de Grouchy), Virginie Gouverneur (on Harriet Taylor Mill, Mary Paley Marshall, and Beatrice Potter Webb), Laura Valladão (on Harriet Taylor Mill), David Philippy (on Hazel Kyrk), Charlotte Le Chapelain and Herrade Igersheim (on Amélie de Dietrich), Miriam Bankovsky (on Elizabeth Hoyt and Margaret Reid), and so on. With this long period of study and the analytical themes, the role of the places (sites), context, and interactions in each period of study seemed to disappear in some chapters of the book.

To encourage further herstories, we might also want to ask about the importance of writing a non-binary herstory that opposes women to men. There are also non-cis-women (women who identify as such even if they were not identified as female at birth) and persons belonging to the LGBTIQA+ population who have also been victims of neglect in standard historiography. Another necessity I felt after reading this book is to have a full global herstory (and not US/UK-centered). Herstory of economics should also include the work of women and LGBTIQA+ people from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. If we want the history of economics to be properly inclusive, perhaps we may even need to replace the "her" with an "open-story" of economics. Another option would be to keep the label "history of economics," integrating all the elements discussed by these recent research programs. Thanks to these works, the history of economics is changing for the better.

The above comments are intended to encourage further studies that build on Kuiper's book, as she has definitely furthered the goal of offering a more gender-sensitive narrative of the history of economics for courses at universities around the world. This kind of herstory has seldom been incorporated into undergraduate and master's curricula until now. Kuiper's book makes us more clearly see why we need to continue writing herstories, both to speak to our current students and to align with the principles of feminist history of economics pedagogy that are at the basis of these discussions.

In sum, I highly recommend and invite you to read *A Herstory of Economics* by Edith Kuiper, as an avenue to creating more narratives that highlight diverse perspectives. We must write more herstories until we reach a point at which the history of economics is so inclusive that we no longer need to use this neologism. Let's all try to include in our courses and research more authors of different genders, of diverse identities, and of diverse locations.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests exist.

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