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Methodology in Feminist Economics – a Case Study of Oral History

Metodologia ekonomii feministycznej – studium przypadku historii mówionej

Abstract

This article examines the methodological foundations of feminist economics and seeks to determine whether the research methods traditionally used in economics are sufficient to achieve feminist goals. The objective of the article is to demonstrate the value of employing qualitative and non-standard research methods in economics - such as oral history - to advance feminist goals and, at the same time, to enrich economic knowledge more broadly. To achieve this, it first discusses economic methodology, contrasting the Cartesian/Euclidean and Babylonian modes of thought. It then presents oral history as a case study of a feminist method of inquiry. Finally, the article discusses the findings of a systematic literature review to demonstrate how oral history has been employed in economic research and for what purposes. The analysis shows that oral history has made a valuable contribution to economic knowledge by capturing dimensions of economic reality. While acknowledging the limitations of the method, the article concludes that oral history is a valuable complement to conventional methods and aligns well with feminist economists' commitment to methodological pluralism.

Keywords: Methodology, Research Methods, Oral History, Feminist Economics, Methodological Pluralism.

JEL: B41, B54

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje metodologiczne podstawy ekonomii feministycznej i stara się odpowiedzieć na pytanie: czy metody badawcze standardowo wykorzystywane w dyscyplinie są wystarczające do osiągnięcia celów stawianych przez ekonomię feministyczną? Celem artykułu jest wykazanie wartości wykorzystania niestandardowych metod badawczych w ekonomii (takich jak historia mówiona) zarówno dla wspierania celów feministycznych, jak i dla wzbogacania wiedzy ekonomicznej. Artykuł wpierw omawia metodologię w ekonomii, kontrastując tradycję euklidesowo-kartezjańską oraz babilońską. Następnie przedstawia historię mówioną jako feministyczną metodę badawczą. Na końcu omówiono wyniki systematycznego przeglądu literatury, przeprowadzonego w celu wykazania, jak i do czego historia mówiona była wykorzystywana w badaniach ekonomicznych. Analiza pokazuje, że historia mówiona wniosła cenny wkład do wiedzy ekonomicznej, uchwytując wymiary rzeczywistości ekonomicznej niedostępne dla standardowych metod. Artykuł, uznając ograniczenia metody, konkluduje, że historia mówiona stanowi cenne uzupełnienie metod konwencjonalnych, wpisując się w zaangażowanie ekonomii feministycznej na rzecz pluralizmu metodologicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: metodologia, metody badawcze, historia mówiona, ekonomia feministyczna, pluralizm metodologiczny.

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1. Introduction

Any science, including a social science such as economics, ought to be about reality. The nature of reality affects how we study it and what we claim about it as a form of knowledge. Knowledge is thus a set of claims based on particular theories and investigations, in which we apply particular methods of inquiry (Morgan, 2016). What counts as evidence for any particular research project is partially constituted by how the research question is formulated. Thus, the philosophical questions of the *real* (ontology) and of how we might know it (epistemology) are embraced or buried in research practices (Schwartz-Shea, 2021).

In this article, we consider the methodology of feminist economics. We place it within the Babylonian mode of thought, which impacts not only the overall reflection on the object of inquiry but also the way we study reality. The main research question is whether it is sufficient to apply conventional research tools to achieve feminist goals, or whether a feminist approach in economics requires innovative research methods. The objective of this article is to demonstrate the value of employing qualitative and non-standard research methods in economics - such as oral history - to advance feminist goals and, at the same time, to enrich economic knowledge more broadly. In achieving this objective, this article also offers an argument in favour of methodological pluralism within the discipline.

The discussion begins with an overview of economic methodology, contrasting the Cartesian/Euclidean and Babylonian modes of thought. It argues that feminist economics is grounded in the latter, emphasising situated knowledge, pluralism and reflexivity. It then introduces oral history as a case study of a feminist method of inquiry, analysing its strengths and limitations. This is followed by a presentation of the findings from a systematic literature review, which illustrates how oral history has been used in economic research and for what analytical purposes. The article concludes by reaffirming the case for methodological pluralism in economics, with particular emphasis on the contribution of oral history as a research method in feminist economics.

2. Methodology and feminist economics

1.1. Methodology and its meaning in economics

Economic methodology may be understood as (1) the collection of tools and techniques economists use to explore economic relations, or as (2) epistemological processes in which economists decide what counts as economic knowledge. In the first sense, methods refer to the set of techniques used for collection and analysis of data (Pickbourn & Ramnarain, 2016, p. 74). In such an approach, methodology concerns whether the methods used enact the philosophical underpinnings of the researcher, implicit or explicit. In the second meaning, methodology addresses questions about who gets to define the domain of economic inquiry, how it is decided which activities will be the subject, which variables will be considered important,

and which premises economists adopt and what nature of scientific analysis they follow (Grapard, 1999, pp. 544–545). The preference for a particular set of methods is significant in that it represents a view of the nature of knowledge and reality. Placing methodology between philosophy and method emphasises that it lies between and connects philosophical concepts and pragmatic decisions made by the researcher at all stages of research (Schwartz-Shea, 2021, p. 142).

There are two traditions in developing economic knowledge: Cartesian/Euclidean and Babylonian (Dow, 1990, 146). The former involves the application of classical deductive logic to a single set of axioms to arrive at universally applicable conclusions. It is a closed system in which all relevant variables describing the economy are known and can be classified as exogenous or endogenous, and relationships between variables are predetermined and transcend space and time (Pickbourn & Ramnarain, 2016, p. 86). Categories of endogenous and exogenous variables are employed as all-encompassing, mutually exclusive and having fixed meanings.

The Cartesian/Euclidean tradition is implicit in mainstream economic theory and prioritises quantitative research. Quantitative researchers are seen as committed to a realist ontology and empiricist epistemology in which reality is single, external, observable and measurable, and in which the knower and the known are separate and independent (Pickbourn & Ramnarain 2016, p. 75). Quality in method is identified primarily with mathematical rigour. The use of formal and mathematical methods is also often presumed to assure the objectivity of economic results.

In the Babylonian mode of thought, there is no single logical chain from axioms to theorems, but there are several parallel, intertwined and mutually reinforcing sets of chains such that no one axiom is logically basic (Stohs, 1983, cited in Dow, 1990, 2012). The Babylonian mode of thought is motivated by the need to address practical questions. It has adopted several lines of reasoning within partial systems in order to build up applicable knowledge. This tradition derives coherence not from a single set of axioms but from a holistic view of how the whole system works (Dow, 1999, p. 21). The Babylonian mode gives primacy to the nature of the subject matter, the understanding of reality as an open system and the judgement that knowledge should be built as a system (Dow, 2013, p. 84). The economy is a complex system in which relevant variables may be unknown, whose boundaries cannot be specified, and in which interrelationships are constantly changing (Pickbourn & Ramnarain, 2016, p. 86, Dow, 2012).

One important aspect of Babylonian thought is that not all knowledge can be expressed formally (Dow, 1990, p. 146). Nevertheless, it was not inspired by a rejection of the Cartesian/Euclidean mode of thought but rather by a holistic type of thought that emphasises uncertainty (Davis, 2023, p. 33). The Babylonian tradition involves drawing on a range of different types of methods to build up a picture that illuminates our understanding of reality (Dow, 2020, p. 64). Research conducted within this tradition must in a sense be historical and involve an understanding of agents and persons, the institutions in which they are immersed, and the facilitative and constitutive role of structures of social relations and their structuring. It must be sensitive to the complexity of causation (Morgan, 2016, p. 29). Individuals are not seen as independent, and their behaviour may change as the environment

changes. Institutions and conventions provide the stability to allow decisions to be taken in such uncertain environments (Dow, 2012).

The Babylonian mode of thought laid the groundwork for advocating pluralism that recognises diverse schools of thought in economics. That pluralism, as Chick and Dow (2005) understand it, is not an *anything goes* approach. Pluralism in Babylonian thought is not p*ure pluralism* but rather structured. They further explain that pluralism in economics is based on how economists understand the relationship between levels of theory and reality. If the real world is understood as organic, not governed by universal laws, then there is scope for a range of methodologies. How the real world is understood will govern the choice of methodology and, in turn, the range of methods to be used (Dow, 2012).

1.2 Feminist economics

The objectivist assumption of positivism presumes that the scholar's objectivity is possible and desirable, and that the scholar can and should set aside their personal values and identities in the conduct of research. Within this framework, *bias* becomes the central concern, and specific research practices are applied to minimise it (Schwartz-Shea, 2021, p. 142). Feminist scholars challenge this understanding, arguing that objectivity cannot be attained solely by the researcher's detachment from the subject of study, or strict adherence to particular methods of inquiry. Instead, they emphasise examining how one's lived experiences shape the research process (Nelson, 1995, p. 141). Sandra Harding (1995) calls the sort of objectivity in which one recognises one's standpoint *strong objectivity*, as contrasted to w*eak objectivity* in which the issue of perspective is left unaddressed. Scholars are inevitably situated within societal structures, thereby affecting the questions asked and how the research is conducted with possible effects on the conclusions drawn. Instead of procedures against bias, the relevant practice is reflexivity: active reflection, during conversations and the research write-up phases, on how identity affects the study (Schwartz-Shea, 2021, p. 142).

Feminist economics is a knowledge project aimed at transforming economics through a feminist perspective. In *feminine* epistemology, to recognise otherness is not to reject *science* but to recognise the situated nature of knowledge as a general phenomenon. This leads to thinking of knowledge as arising from human logic, as provisional and subject to uncertainty, and requiring persuasion as demonstration is impossible (Dow, 2020, p. 61). Economics is best understood as a discourse; it is a system of meanings, categories and beliefs, articulated and supported by various practices and institutions (Barker, 2003).

While there are many varieties of feminism, they all share a concern with remedying the disadvantages historically borne by women (Nelson, 1995, p. 131). Feminists share the belief that women are subordinated to men to a degree that is morally wrong and unnecessary. By using gender as an analytical framework, feminist economists have demonstrated that traditional male-centric values are deeply ingrained in both the theoretical and empirical aspects of economics. Barker (2005, p. 2189) argues that without feminist analyses, economics tends to justify and normalise existing

social hierarchies. Another trait shared by all feminist economists is the belief that women's economic contribution and lives have, until recently, been neglected in analyses. Nevertheless, economic research dealing with women and gender is not all feminist economics, as a feminist perspective implies a critique of male supremacy, a desire to change this, and the conviction that it is changeable (Grapard, 1999, p. 545).

Feminist economics encompasses a wide range of ideas rather than a single body of thought (Agenjo-Calderón & Gálvez-Muñoz, 2019). This diversity stems from the fact that the intellectual groundwork was established by scholars working in different schools of economic thought, while feminist perspectives also derived from distinct schools (Agenjo-Calderón & Gálvez-Muñoz, 2019, p. 141; Barker, 2005, p. 2192). Longino (1987) characterises feminist science as a process-based rather than content-based approach (Jacobsen, 2021, p. 130). Although feminist economists do not necessarily share a common ideological or political perspective, they do have a commitment to methodologies that help formulate theoretical models and practical proposals that will lead to emancipatory change for women (Grapard, 1999, p. 553). The following five core methodological assumptions are given for feminist economics by Marilyn Power (2004, p. 4):

1. Care and unpaid (domestic) labour are vital parts of any economic system;
2. Human wellbeing is a central measure of economic success, with attention paid not only to distribution of income and wealth, but also to individual entitlements and the heterogeneity of human needs;
3. Human agency, including questions of power, is important;
4. Ethical judgements are a valid and desirable part of an economic analysis;
5. Consideration of class, race-ethnicity and other factors in their research recognises the limits of theorising *women* as a homogeneous category.

Feminists have four main objections to traditional methods of inquiry in economics: (1) the focus of research, which frequently overlooks issues regarding women; (2) the research outcomes, which frequently justify the status quo and thus the existing power relationships and myths about women; (3) the assumptions in traditional scientific inquiry that research is value-free; and (4) the process of traditional research, which they argue maintains traditional power relations (Kim, 1997, pp. 100–101). The economist, when isolated from the subject of the study (by the deductive-positivist approach), loses the opportunity to understand the subtleties of economic life.

1.3 Methodology and feminist approach

The pervasive exclusion of much of women's economic activity has led many economists to display a certain scepticism towards the formal model-building and techniques that currently dominate economic research. Moreover, because feminist economists are interested in issues that require more nuanced and interpretive accounts, they often face the task of generating their own primary data or new qualitative methods of analysis. Much of the theoretical and applied research conducted by feminist economists focuses on a critical examination of the methodological shortcomings of existing frameworks and on proposing methodological changes that would better serve feminist objectives (Grapard, 1999, p. 551).

Since there are dangers associated with the particular research culture for feminist projects in economics, an alternative methodological vision has been articulated. Kim (1997, pp. 102–103) puts forward a list of principles on which such an alternative should be based:

1. Bringing feminist perspectives into the research;
2. Using research to induce social change;
3. Using *conscious subjectivity* instead of value-free objectivity;
4. Bringing the researcher into the research;
5. Reducing the distance between the researcher and the research subjects.

However, there is considerable agreement in the feminist literature that there is no distinctive feminist method, but rather feminist applications of methods, and that the research question rather than the method should drive the research. Greater use of qualitative methods and enhanced complementarities between quantitative and qualitative methods help feminist economists expand the range of topics to include issues, activities and groups of marginal concern to the discipline (Berik, 1997, p. 121–122). Proponents of qualitative methodology argue that this allows the development and formulation of hypotheses from the lived experiences of actors, and provides greater insight into causal processes and depth of information. Qualitative research brings to light information that would otherwise not be readily apparent or might not be captured by any scale of measurement (Pickbourn &Ramnarain, 2016, p. 77).

Peregrine Schwarz-Shea (2021, p. 140) writes that the predominant method of data generation in the field is interviewing. A few publications indicate specific interview forms, such as life histories. Feminist applications of qualitative and quantitative research methods tend to put greater faith in people's own voices. Extensive conversations allow the participant-observer to understand the institutional constraints and the complex processes that yield certain outcome variables in ways not possible based on survey responses (Grapard, 1999, p. 553). Feminist scholars argue that the use of a broader range of tools to study and teach about a wider territory of economic activity would make economics a more productive discipline (Nelson, 1995, p. 146).

If all human knowledge is situated, then any account of the world is inevitably shaped by the experiences of its producers. Thus, reconceptualising economic practice as story-telling may further feminist efforts to transform economic knowledge and practice (Strassman &Polanyi, 1995, p. 129). Interviews and questionnaires shed light on routinised behaviour, while also offering a deeper understanding of disruptive effects on individuals and groups (Bracarense & Johnson, 2016, p. 104–105). Oral history, as a non-traditional form of history, is a tool that may serve feminist objectives.

2. Case study of oral history as a feminist method of inquiry

2.1. Feminist and oral history

Oral history refers to the primary-source material created in an interview setting with a witness or participant and the interview process itself (Sommer & Quinlan, 2009). Private oral history is an established source in the field of feminist history,

serving to introduce women and their perspectives into otherwise male-centric historical accounts, and to integrate women and their lives into historical scholarship (Gajewska, 2008; Sangster, 1994).

Sangster (1994) notes that oral history as a source was treated with a degree of suspicion that has never been applied to written sources. Initially, to counter this criticism from positivist social scientists and traditional documentary historians, researchers sought to produce stringent guidelines (Thomson, 1998). These were meant to enable comparative analysis and minimise the researcher's impact on the stories being told in various ways, but they ignored the cultural embeddedness of the interview. The next generation of oral history researchers took it upon themselves to use the method as a means of contesting hegemonic discourses of knowledge and power (Kałwa, 2021). Oral history was welcomed by feminist scholars, who used it to recover women's history and perspectives and integrate them into historical scholarship, as well as to determine directions for future research grounded in what the interviewees themselves considered important (Sangster, 1994).

As with the goals of feminist economics in economics, feminist historians rejected positivist commitments to objectivity and neutrality. Although important, the aim of feminist women's history is not simply to insert the accounts of women and other marginalised groups into existing history built within dominant historical research paradigms. Instead, it aims to question the neutrality of knowledge production and disrupt its discriminatory practices (Abrams, 2019). Feminist women's history argues for centring activities, phenomena and issues crucial from the perspective of women participants in historical events, or key to understanding them in the present (Kałwa, 2021). This requires not just the use of gender as a category of analysis, but also a deeper reconfiguration of the hierarchies of historical events and definitions of the field of research.

2.2. Characteristics, advantages and limitations of the method

Oral history accounts can deepen and enrich understanding of the past, providing ground-level insight into details of daily life that established sources may have missed. However, the strength of oral history as a method lies in its ability to go beyond a simple recovery of past events. By examining them through the lens of personal experience, it offers a more complex picture and gives insight into the experiences, feelings, opinions and challenges the narrators faced (Coufalová 2024). This retelling contains the narrator's evaluation of events (including past attitudes and actions) from the perspective of the present day, which can be affected by factors such as the official historical record or current politics of memory. Through oral history we can understand not only what happened but also the subjective nuances of *how* and *why* it happened, and how those events are understood, perceived, and remembered by narrators in the present (Isola, 2024; Leyk & Wawrzyniak, 2020). The narrators' psychological truth is as much a historical fact as any other; it is a fact they believe (Portelli, 1991).

These discoveries are not limited to the individual; oral history also reveals an event's hidden social dimensions and the individual's sense of self and place

in society, bound to the community (Mata & Lee, 2007). It can also highlight the connections between individual experience and the larger historical context, capturing the ways in which major shifts translate into changes in people's everyday lives (Mysliwietz-Fleiß, 2010). Oral history can thus serve as a way to complement, contextualise and fill the gaps in the existing historical record, or provide a source when no such record exists. Beyond serving this supportive role, oral history can also be used to problematise the claim that there is a single true universal story to begin with, by emphasising the multiplicity of experience (Crawford & Bailey, 2019).

Finally, where a record is available, evidence from oral history interviews can serve as a counterweight to the narratives based solely on official documents. It can also correct or call into question misconceptions about the event or period and, more importantly, to balance the official record with *grassroots insight* (Crawford & Bailey, 2019). Thus, the method questions hegemonic historical discourse, as it can give voice to groups misrepresented in or left out of historical scholarship due to marginalisation, and integrate them into the historical record (Coufalová 2024; Ernstson & Nilsson, 2022; Maclean et al., 2017). Importantly, this opportunity to tell one's story on one's own terms through an oral history interview can also have a positive impact on marginalised oral historians. Oral history interviews support the preservation of both individual and collective identity, and the process itself can be affirming or even healing for the narrators (Maclean et al., 2017; Wiesner, 2021).

A major concern about using oral history to uncover the past is its reliance on memory, particularly of events far in the past. Dependence on narrators' recollections of distant events may limit the accuracy and completeness of information collected through oral history interviews (Ernstson & Nilsson, 2022). Recollections, for example of policies, can be hazy or may prove inconsistent with official records. Memories become distorted over time, influenced by subsequent experiences, nostalgia, prevailing collective narratives about the event, and the narrator's ever-changing feelings and sense of identity (Coufalová & Žídek, 2024; Mysliwietz-Fleiß, 2010). Moreover, narrators may modify what they remember to fit their sense of identity and their life story, aiming to shape it in a way that reflects their preferred self-images. What is collected is therefore the truth for that group of individuals, but not historical fact (McKinney, 2020).

The relationship between oral history and the methods used when developing knowledge about the social structures which underpin it is thus complex. On the one hand, oral historians use a variety of alternative sources in order to cross-triangulate, complement and more reliably interpret information gathered through oral history interviews (or *vice versa*). On the other, oral history interviews can be expected to sometimes bring to light information which complicates or directly contradicts the story presented in other sources, in particular official written record (e.g. archives, government reports).

In addition, knowing that what they say will be received and reviewed by a broad group of researchers may lead interviewees to self-censor or omit information, for instance if they engaged in frowned-upon activities. Finally, the outcome of an oral history interview is influenced by the researcher, as it reflects the interaction of two subjectivities – that of the interviewer and of the narrator – a process termed

intersubjectivity (Coufalová, 2024). This inherent subjectivity and fluidity thus make it impossible, despite steps taken, to generalise the findings. Some feminist researchers have raised concerns about the method's ability to bring the voices of marginalised groups to wider audiences. Beyond the practical difficulties of reaching such groups, there is a concern that oral history research is romanticised. While it has been celebrated for stepping away from supposed detachment and objectivity, researchers risk using their (shared) identity to obtain information while ignoring the inherent inequality of the relationship between themselves and the narrator (Sangster, 1994). Geiger (1990) points to the limits of marginality and representativeness as analytical categories, stressing that marginality depends on both parties accepting the relationship as such and cannot simply be assumed. Such assumptions risk the researcher's own positioning overshadowing the narrator's experience. Finally, oral history's capacity to challenge hegemonic knowledge may be restricted if it serves as a means to write for someone rather than enabling their active participation in contesting the official historical narrative (Benson & Nagar, 2006).

2.3. Systematic review: oral history in economic research

Regardless of the limitations discussed in the previous section, oral history as a research method ultimately provides an opportunity to collect data that can complete the complex picture of economic reality. A systematic literature review was conducted to map the use of oral history (or similar methods, such as biographical interviews) to study economic events. Overall, 157 searches, using such keywords as *oral history* and *economics* were carried out using the Elsevier database. To illustrate the scope of the search and its results, table 1 presents a selection of the keywords used and the number of results yielded by each, starting from broad keywords and narrowing down.

Table 1.
Selection of searches used during the review.

Keywords	Number of results
"oral history" "economic"	1117
"oral history" economy	415
"oral history" economics	105
"oral history" women economy work	42
"oral history" "economic history"	38
economics "oral history" women	26
economic care labor "oral history"	17
"oral history" gendered labour economy	8
economic reproductive work "oral history"	4
"autobiographical narrative interviews" economy	2
economic "care work" "oral history"	1

Source: own work.

In keeping with the ambitions of the method, the work frequently uncovered cases highlighting *ordinary* (and often marginalised) groups, whose experiences had previously been minimised or entirely left out of the official historical record. These included women, racial and ethnic minorities, and representatives of the working class from a variety of economic sectors.

Work directly related to economics is scarcer, although certain notable examples were uncovered during the review. The findings show that oral history has been used to study the impact of historically significant socioeconomic shifts on the everyday lives of individuals, subjective understandings of economic and social identity, the formation of groups and social movements, and the strategies these individuals and groups employed in the wake of these changes. Such shifts included large-scale privatisations (Brudney, 2022), transitions from centrally planned to market economies (Błąd, 2022; Bonfiglioli, 2015; Leyk & Wawrzyniak, 2020; Maclean et al., 2017), the introduction of austerity policies (Hall, 2022), agricultural modernisation (Sitar, 2021), deindustrialisation (Murray, 2022), and various systemic failures (Schwekendiek & Mercier, 2016).

King and Vullnetari (2016) use oral history interviews with rural Albanians who lived and worked in rural cooperatives and state farms across the country during communism, building their analysis around the dialectical relationship between the *shortage economy* and the *second economy*, which developed in response to the imbalances and blockages of the *first*. This *view from below* afforded by the interviews supplied detailed information on the narrators' daily lives, and in particular their struggles and strategies for surviving and adapting to the system and its shortcomings.

Coufalová and Žídek (2024) use oral history interviews to fill information gaps by providing insight into the factors explaining the successful economic transformation of the Czech Republic at the microeconomic level. They argue that a *more sociological approach*, using qualitative methods, is necessary to shine light on the little-studied internal company processes and the human dimension of business. In addition, their research also shows how company managers lived through this tumultuous period of change. Because of the distortive nature of memory recall, the authors focus not on the reconstruction of historic events, but on the frustrations, challenges and other human dimensions of the shifts taking place.

McKinney (2020) conducted oral history interviews with Russian women, exploring their economic experiences against the backdrop of economic transformation. The interviews uncovered not only how the changes taking place affected their everyday lives, but also their perceptions (for example, of the government and its relationship with the population, of policies) and subjective assessments of the impact these changes had. The way the narratives of struggle were constructed by the narrators hinted at their own perception of this struggle. Moreover, McKinney noted that the boundaries delineated by historical periods, economic concepts, or textbook definitions became blurred at the level of personal experience.

Although most studies employing oral history methodology were limited to qualitative methods, there were exceptions. Coufalová et al. (2020) combine oral history interviews with econometric analysis to examine the relationship between

socialist Czechoslovakia's international competitiveness leading up to the transition and its productive growth during the transition. The authors conducted oral history interviews with managers of socialist enterprises to determine the factors that contributed to their competitiveness in international trade, and then turned to econometric analysis to uncover whether the competitiveness of a given sector had any bearing on its production growth during the transition period.

Beyond this, oral history has been used to contextualise or enrich our knowledge of certain periods of interest, for instance by uncovering micro-level features of business activity (Clark & Soulsby, 1995). Oral history could play an important role in researching the contemporary business history of emerging markets, where written archival sources (corporate records) may be severely lacking, have more restricted access for researchers, or are absent altogether.

Jones and Comunale (2019) discuss an archive of audio and video interviews with (former) leaders of firms and NGOs in emerging markets. The project provided a more nuanced understanding of business practices and new insights into known trends, insight into why certain things did *not* happen, the impact of government policies as they were rolled out, and the motivations guiding entrepreneurs. The authors note that in addition to these contributions, oral history archives of this kind could help shift the focus of researchers, currently on developed countries (with corporate records), to emerging markets.

These examples demonstrate that oral history has many uses, including in the field of economics, and should not be viewed as a method of last resort, solely to be used in the absence of any official records. Oral history can explain the reasons behind actions taken by individuals or companies, reveal the impact of government policies (including impact that is difficult to establish using traditional sources alone), and show the development of collective economic institutions and social movements, as well as the drivers and consequences of corruption. It is capable of capturing micro-level shifts and responses to broad changes, and the experiences and individual challenges faced by economic actors, which are impossible to trace in general economic literature. Furthermore, by adding this *human dimension* to economic research and encompassing the diversity of experience lost in traditional data sources, oral history also helps counter hegemonic narratives presenting certain events in a wholly positive or negative light. Crucially, these contributions do not rely on the assumption that oral accounts are an unbiased source that represents an objective truth; rather, the subjectivity is part of the value.

3. Conclusions

Feminist economics is a knowledge project that strives to understand the subordinated position of women in the economy and remedy it. As such, it requires a methodological approach representing a particular view of the nature of reality and knowledge. This perspective guides feminist economics towards understanding economic reality as an open system and the Babylonian mode of thought. To understand the complexity of the position women hold, a holistic view that sees

economic and non-economic activities as intertwined is preferred. Adopting such a perspective requires the application of diversified methods of inquiry, some of them widely used in the discipline, while others are still a novelty.

Since economics is about better understanding reality, and feminist economics draws from lived experiences, oral history might be a method well suited to this aim. This particular research method gives voice to women themselves, enabling them to tell their own stories and revealing what has been concealed. Following Kim (1997), oral history can be understood as a research method that introduces a feminist perspective into the research process by employing *conscious subjectivity*, and situating the researcher within the research context. This approach reduces the distance between the researcher and the research subject and makes visible dimensions of economic activity that have been traditionally overlooked or hidden, like emotions.

Although it is not a new research method, it remains a non-standard one in economics. Its use, however, helps to advance feminist goals by uncovering experiences and practices that have been excluded from economic analysis to date. Most importantly, it enriches our knowledge of reality. As we have described in this article, diversified methods of inquiry are not used to replace more conventional research tools, but rather to expand the range of instruments, introducing methodological pluralism in the discipline.

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