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# The Role of Oral History in the Historiography of Heterodox Economics

Tiago Mata and Frederic S. Lee

In recent years, we have witnessed in the history of economics a remarkable increase in the publication of biographies, autobiographies, biographical dictionaries, collections of interviews, and oral histories (surveyed in Forget 2002 and Moggridge 2003). For the history of heterodox economics,<sup>1</sup> the trend has been the collection of brief autobiographical testimonies and biographical entries into dictionary volumes (Harcourt 1993; Arestis and Sawyer [1992] 2000; Backhouse and Middleton 2000). This literature comprises simple narratives, exclusively concerned with the professional life of individuals, typically stringing together an author's contributions to reveal a unifying intellectual mission.

We thank the participants at the 2006 *HOPE* conference for their critical engagement with our essay; in particular, we have greatly benefited from the comments of an anonymous referee and from the suggestions of this volume's editors, E. Roy Weintraub and Evelyn Forget. Tiago Mata has benefited from a travel grant from the Central London Research Fund to conduct interviews with American radical economists and from a postdoctoral fellowship from the Economic and Social Research Council (U.K.) for the writing of this essay. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the radical economists who spoke to us about their economics and politics, in particular Laurie Nisonoff, Nancy Wiegiersma, Herbert Gintis, Michael Zweig, John Weeks, and Barry Bluestone.

1. The term *heterodox economics* refers in a collective sense to various heterodox approaches and paradigms, such as Austrian, feminist, Marxian, Post Keynesian, and radical economics; to the community of heterodox economists who engage in and across the paradigms; and to the development of an alternative economic theory and policy that draws from the various heterodox approaches.

The flood of testimonies and short biographies has so far had a modest impact on the arguments of historians of heterodox economics. For instance, the most recent and significant work in the history of Post Keynesian economics, *A History of Post Keynesian Economics since 1936* by John E. King (2002), makes only passing reference to life history details despite its author's conversations with Post Keynesians about their working lives (King 1995). In King's comprehensive intellectual history, biographical materials appear sparingly, never exceeding a paragraph, serving only to introduce his cast of characters. These materials convey information about nationality and education, not unlike what one would find on the first page of a CV or in a short entry to a biographical dictionary (King 2002, 18, 35–36, 105, 110, 114, 125, 185). The only biographical resource used recurrently by King is A. P. Thirwall's (1987) biography of Nicholas Kaldor, from which King (2002, 49–50, 63, 76) draws to support a running commentary on Kaldor's political and policy commitments and to explain his theoretical dilettantism.

We wish to distinguish our approach to the history of heterodox economics from earlier contributions, where “it was the ideas that were paramount. Anything uniquely personal about the author of the ideas—passions, idiosyncrasies, or even ‘vision’—was considered irrelevant” (Forget 2002, 231). We do not propose a history of heterodox theory, which has already been partially accomplished,<sup>2</sup> but a history of the heterodox community that provides the social basis for theory development.<sup>3</sup> We seek to get at the social relationships and agency that ensured that heterodox economists could do research and publish in heterodox economics, could teach it, and could engage in professional and activist heterodox activities.

Our essay addresses the problem of how life histories can be used to write the history of heterodox economics as a history of communities of scholars. Our contention is that social relationships are not easily discerned from the professional writings of scholars. Instead, we suggest that the sites for this evidence are a variety of dispersed personal media, locked away in private correspondence or in the unspoken memories of the participants. In

2. See, for example, Howard and King 1989, 1992; King 2002; and Hodgson 2004.

3. We speak here of community instead of network. We acknowledge that the term *network* is favored by the sociology of knowledge literature, but since we wish to address dimensions that are sometimes lost in sociological and semiotic analysis, such as emotional, trust, and personal ties between historical subjects, the concept of community seems more adequate.

our research we have considered published testimonies; conducted “oral history interviewing” (Morrisey 1998); and solicited from participants their written memories of particular events.<sup>4</sup> We are not biographers, as we do not seek from these materials to build an account of a life. Instead, we have used life histories as a record of the making of relationships of identity and difference in the heterodox community (Peacock and Holland 1993; Watson 1976).<sup>5</sup>

Reflective statements by historians of economics on life histories have tended to focus on the failings of memory (Moggridge 2003, 597; Tribe 1997; Weintraub 2005). It has often been remarked that memory weighs, distorts, and displaces events, particularly in “life history interviews” where the recollection of dates or sequences of events are ostensibly shown to be unreliable (Portelli 1991). If our concern is with fact, then one may invoke Carlo Ginzburg’s (1992) description of the practice of history as akin to detective work. It is only by being attentive to many clues and details that the mysteries of the past may be uncovered, and one should seek multiple sources of evidence as checks to the informant’s memory. It is unlikely that a formula can be devised to replace the historian’s judgment. History is a craft that cannot be fully formalized, and one must rely on the unscientifically sounding “instinct, insight and intuition” (Ginzburg 1992, 125).

It is when autobiographical testimonies are made to do more than recover past events that they begin to yield insights that no other evidential source can match.<sup>6</sup> Both the written testimony and the life history interview are “the construction and expression of one’s subjectivity. To ignore or exorcise subjectivity, as if it were only a noxious interference in the pure data, is ultimately to distort and falsify the nature of the data themselves” (Portelli 1997, 80). We propose to look at how heterodox economists have constructed the narrative of their lives (Portelli 1998). As Paul John Eakin (this volume) argues, self-narration is our culture’s privileged resource to experience selfhood and locate it in the cultural

4. Each of these materials poses particular problems. For instance, oral sources need to be studied differently from written ones, to consider the nature of orality and the study of pauses—see the overview provided in Portelli 1991.

5. Our aim is akin to that of Mike Reay’s (this volume). Reay studies the multiple and heterogeneous “images” or “identities” economists may hold in relation to their profession, expressed in statements about what economists “know” or “do.” Our emphasis is on how one such self-image, the radical one, was historically constituted.

6. The papers collected in the volume edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (1998) forcefully make this point.

landscape. Far from polluting historical discourse, the subjective discourse of the participants is an invaluable resource for historical and ethnographic research.

In the remainder of this essay we illustrate how we believe subjectivity, expressed in interviews and testimonies, can be used for the history of heterodox economics communities. Our case study is on radical economics, and we begin section 1 with a brief account of the founding of the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE). Then, we illustrate how life histories can be used to uncover the formation of identity between heterodox economists. Our material refers to the first crucial years of URPE's growth in creating a radical community. In the second section, we address a silence of the written record. Through the 1970s, URPE was subject to a series of schisms that were not registered in print. Life histories are the only entry point to study these troubling times. The essay concludes with a discussion of what it means to use life histories to make visible what is invisible.

## **1. Life Histories and the Creation of the Radical Economics Community**

Heterodox economic theories and communities of heterodox economists have existed in the United States throughout the twentieth century. However, as a result of repression by McCarthyism, the pre-1950s heterodoxy seemed doomed and, as a corollary, that the history of heterodoxy had run its course. Yet from the 1960s communities of Marxist-radical, institutional, Post Keynesian, and social economists were created anew, without clear lines of descent both intellectual and social from the earlier heterodoxy (Lee 2000, 2004a, 2004b). The historian is thus posed with a striking discontinuity, and the problem of accounting for the formation of these new heterodox entities *ex nihilo*.

URPE was formed at a five-day conference held at Ann Arbor, Michigan, from 4 to 8 September 1968.<sup>7</sup> “It was attended by a small group of twelve graduate students and faculty members, all of whom were affected and influenced by the civil rights movement, Vietnam War, feminist movement, and the New Left” (Lee 2004a, 187–88). Meetings between radical faculty members and students in economics preceded the founding of URPE. These meetings are difficult to chronicle, for they left no written

7. Members are often referred to as “URPErs.”

records. From the memory of participants these seemed to have been frequent and informal, and mainly organized from the University of Michigan (186–87).

The preliminary contacts between radicals are insufficient to account for the remarkable and immediate increase in URPE's membership. In December 1968, three months after its formal creation, the first issue of its *Newsletter* reported a total membership of three hundred paying members and an even more impressive mailing list of eight hundred names (Bluestone 1969, 5). How were the twelve graduate students and young faculty from the Ann Arbor meeting able to achieve such a success?<sup>8</sup> The argument of this section is that an answer can be given only with resort to the detail of life histories and to the subjectivity they evince.<sup>9</sup>

If we survey the published autobiographical testimonies of radical economists, it is striking to find that although they refer to the 1960s as a crucial formative period for their research commitments, there is only brief mention of URPE. Most of these autobiographical entries become an occasion to review a life work of a radical economist and to reveal connections between what may appear to be diverse interests and contributions. Such intellectual reflections are usually performed to the detriment of more private aspects of a life. Recurrent in these narratives is the reference to the “political ferment” of sixties’ social movements, said to have fundamentally shaped radicals’ political convictions and directed their interests in scholarship (Sherman [1992] 2000, 604; Reich [1992] 2000, 578).

Some of these autobiographical testimonies are more revealing, such as that of Samuel Bowles. Bowles ([1992] 2000) begins his life narrative by retelling how in his first year teaching introductory economics his students challenged him on the curriculum's social relevance. He adds, “They continued to press me, but they were leaning on an open door. It was 1965” (Bowles [1992] 2000, 73).<sup>10</sup> For Thomas Weisskopf ([1992] 2000,

8. The rise in membership was sustained through the early 1970s—from 1969 to 1972 membership increased 40 percent a year (Historical Profile of URPE 1976).

9. For this and the following section we draw on a set of over twenty interviews collected by Mata with radical economists for an ongoing project on the history of radical economics. These were all one- to two-hour interviews collected in close accordance with the precepts set by oral historians and “life history interviewing” (see Thompson 1988 and Seldon and Pappworth 1983).

10. The mid-1960s is often identified as the tipping point for the formation of a critical-radical consciousness among the young economics faculty. For another instance, “From 1966 on it became increasingly difficult to persuade oneself that public service in the US would have any positive effect on issues of poverty, social justice, civil rights and peace” (Foley [1992] 2000, 182).

710), the critical experience that radicalized his views on economics was research work in planning India's economic development; he became disillusioned "about the relevance of mainstream economics." URPE appears in these narratives as a late-sixties phenomenon, to which these leading radical figures proudly claim ownership as founding members (Bowles [1992] 2000, 75; Gordon [1992] 2000, 250; Weisskopf [1992] 2000, 710; Reich [1992] 2000, 578; Sherman [1992] 2000, 604).

Inasmuch as the lives contained in the available (auto)biographical collections are those of the generally recognized leaders of the radical community, they may provide us with a view of the past that emphasizes the motives of the founding cohort of radicals, which are also the elite within the radical community.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, these were scholars who, after intense involvement in the organization of the radical community throughout the 1970s, abandoned active participation in URPE in the early 1980s. It is likely that this subjective distance leads these individuals to retrospectively consider URPE of lesser significance. A different perspective of this past arises when one records the life narratives of a younger cohort of radicals,<sup>12</sup> or of those who constituted the rank and file of URPE in the 1970s, who have to this day maintained their commitment to URPE.

In the remainder of this essay we focus on the life narrative of one radical economist, Laurie Nisonoff, as an entry point to some of the issues that affected URPE in the early 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Her life is not intended to be representative of a radical's life, and the subplots we selected from Nisonoff's narration should not be taken as a definitive account of the radical group's history. This life narrative is instructive when placed alongside evidence collected in other interviews or from URPE's publications. It is the corroboration (or contradiction) between these various bits of evidence that we wish to explore in detail.

11. *Elite* in this context is meant to denote an older cohort of scholars who were hired in the early 1970s by universities with graduate programs and research opportunities.

12. For the younger cohort the radical experience is not just one of conversion to radical ideas but also one of joining their older graduate colleagues and the young radical faculty. For instance, William H. Lazonick (2000, 414) recalls how he was surprised at Harvard University by the presence of a score of radicals who assisted him in developing his own critical ideas. For those entering graduate school in 1968–71, the story is no longer one of a solitary conversion to radicalism but of a collective undertaking. Consistent with our interpretation, research in political science has underlined the effect of generation and cohort in determining what events are recalled and how they are interpreted (see Schuman and Scott 1989).

13. Our approach echoes that of Mary Terrall (2006, 308–9), reflecting on how to consider issues of social identity in the context of a single life.

In 1968 Nisonoff decided to major in economics.<sup>14</sup> She had entered MIT the previous year to study mathematics. As was the case for many students of the late 1960s, the choice of economics was partly informed by leftist political convictions (Horowitz 1986). Nisonoff recalls:

I discovered that not only was mathematics no longer very interesting, but mathematicians . . . had absolutely no social awareness, and absolutely no social skills and it was, it was incredibly lonely! Plus, you know, meanwhile back on the ranch, I had been doing all this political work for years. So I had all this political work over here, and then I have this beautiful pure mathematics over there, but there seemed to be no connection.

When she was asked about how she had joined URPE, Nisonoff did not produce a theoretical justification but remembered a collection of events that register her personal involvement with other radicals.<sup>15</sup> Nisonoff joined URPE after being introduced to the group by MIT leftists. What drew the MIT URPEers together were not merely shared intellectual concerns. What Nisonoff highlights in her narrative are the political convictions and activities they held in common, which distinguished them as a group:

When URPE began, at MIT, . . . the undergrads, the graduate students and the young faculty just did things together. . . . In that fall, in early November, . . . soldiers that were trying to avoid being sent to Vietnam would go AWOL, and we protected them. This young man stayed with us at MIT and hundreds of people took turns staying with him. . . . I was [there] and . . . these various graduate students and undergraduates, . . . some of the faculty, including Duncan Foley and Matt Edel. . . . And we were talking about the war and imperialism, the left young faculty were actually teaching their classes there, my fellow majors had to come in to the occupation.<sup>16</sup>

14. Laurie Nisonoff was interviewed on 6 June 2003, at her office in Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

15. The same was true of other interviews. For instance, both Michael Zweig (interviewed 18 June 2003, in New York) and John Weeks (interviewed 10 February 2006, in London) recalled the conflict between graduate students and teaching assistants and the Michigan faculty over the awarding of grades that would be the basis for the Selective Service System to draft half of the undergraduate students to fight in Vietnam (for further details, see Brazer 1982, 248–49).

16. This was a major event at MIT; see, for instance, Noam Chomsky's recollection of it in Chomsky et al. 1997.

In her narration about joining URPE, Nisonoff contrasted the identification she felt with the URPE group with estrangement from her conventional colleagues:

'Cause a lot of people had the social skills of furniture, and they did their homework, and they stayed in. . . . I got in a lot of trouble with the other women in my class. . . . it turned out that the room we were doing this in [protecting the AWOL soldier] was where our junior prom was supposed to be. At that point there were people in the women's dorm who never spoke to me again . . . to this day, because the junior prom was cancelled!

Trivial as these events may seem to our habitual historical discourse, they are the highlights in participants' life narratives, particularly as conveyed in interviews. In participants' perceptions, in their subjectivities, these events record the formation of bounds of identity (inevitably also of friendship) between fellow radicals in economics. Furthermore, it is also a testimony to the confrontational dynamics of this period: as the bounds between radicals strengthened, so did radicals' estrangement from their mainstream colleagues and teachers.

Our argument gives us cause to research which events took place in the formative years of URPE, roughly from 1968 to 1971; to provide their chronology; and to study their impact on the burgeoning URPE. For 1969 Nisonoff recalled the New England conference that she helped organize.<sup>17</sup> The conference was held in her last year at MIT prior to her departure to Yale University for graduate work. It appears the choice of Yale was made after she had befriended graduate students from that university, whom she had met at the New England conference and also, crucially, at the 1969 protest to the American Economic Association (for a report of the protests, see pages 487–89 of the *Papers and Proceedings* issue of the 1970 volume of the *American Economic Review*).<sup>18</sup> What is significant for our purpose is how the life story records the formation of a community. The example offered by Nisonoff's life story shows how conferences and the AEA protest were occasions to enlist new members for URPE and to strengthen ties of friendship and comradeship between URPE members.

17. For a report on the meeting, see URPE National Conference 1969 and New England Regional Conference 1969.

18. Nisonoff mentioned Heidi Hartmann, Peggy Howard, Fran Blau, and Rich Weisskopf from New Haven and Lourdes (Surkin) Beneria from New York.

In its early years URPE did not lack ambition. Radicals wanted their economics to be personal and political, and their organization to reflect that project by becoming more than a professional association (see Wachtel and Bluestone 1969). Outside the curricular calendar URPE organized an annual summer conference starting in 1969. The first one was held 24–31 August at Camp Sea Gull, in Charlevoix, Michigan.<sup>19</sup> The summer conferences had a diverse agenda. While nearly all sessions were concerned with economic topics, some were decidedly more oriented toward activism than others. This is evident with regard to sessions on imperialism (1969, 1970, 1971), teaching and curriculum (1969, 1970), radical paradigms (1971), political economy of health care (1970, 1971), capitalism’s alternative (1969, 1971), women’s liberation (1969, 1970, 1971), community action programs (1970, 1971), and ghetto and black liberation (1969, 1970, 1971).<sup>20</sup> The conferences were an occasion to debate organizational strategy for URPE, but they were also a place to celebrate and to play. The announcement for the first conference read: “All of the facilities of the camp including tennis courts, sail boats, canoes, power boats, swimming, archery, baseball, football, etc. are available to conference participants. We are planning to arrange the conference so that at least one-third of your time can be spent in recreation. Child care will be arranged. Participants should bring their own bedding and tennis balls. Pets are allowed” (URPE National Conference 1969). It is the element of play and passionate political debating that radicals recall best in interviews. For example, although today Herbert Gintis no longer sees promise in radical analysis and has dissociated himself from the community, he recalls with fondness the political work URPEers did together and the convivial character of their organization: “We got together to hand out, we sang, we made up songs, we, you know, we made love to each other.”<sup>21</sup> And as another radical

19. The second conference was held at Camp Wakitatina, north of Pittsburgh, from 27 to 31 August. In this second year, there was not enough cabin space for all the expected participants, and URPEers were encouraged to bring tents (URPE Summer Conference 1970; Summer Conference Urges Action 1970).

20. The sessions were also standard fare at various national, regional, and local URPE-radical conferences held from 1969 to 1971, which also included sessions on critiques of mainstream economics, inflation, Marxist methodology, monopoly and monopoly capital, and the economics of housework; see the issues of the *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics* published between 1969 and 1971.

21. Herbert Gintis was interviewed on 6 June 2003, at his home in Northampton, Massachusetts. More generally, social activities, such as parties, lunches, dinners, and guerrilla theater, were built into most URPE-radical conferences; see the issues of the *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics* published between 1969 and 1971.

acknowledged with praise: “Those of us who attended left the [summer] Conference with a feeling of unity which could not have been attained in any other way” (Hinckley 1969).<sup>22</sup>

The point we are making here is one of community and identity. Participants’ narratives of their lives register the formation of a radical economics identity, which sustains the community that is URPE. The life histories that radicals tell reveal that this identity was forged during protests within academia, where the radicals joined each other and where they became estranged from their conventional colleagues and faculty. The meetings organized under URPE’s auspices further strengthened the identity: the regional conferences and the summer meeting. This identity was not strictly intellectual in content; it reflected a political and cultural overlap best illustrated in the activities of the summer conference. Play seems to have been as crucial to building a radical economics community as a conviction of the faults of mainstream economics.

## **2. Life Histories and Conflicts within the Radical Community**

The argument of this essay is that life histories provide clues to the emergence of communities of scholars, revealing the making of bonds of identity that underpin their intellectual commitments. The same evidence can be instructive in understanding the emergence of difference within communities. Current historical scholarship has ignored a wealth of internal strife that reshaped the radical community in the 1970s. These controversies are salient in the primary literature, in the written record of URPE’s *Newsletter*, most dramatically in its August 1975 issue.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere in the secondary literature these debates are ignored, both in the intellectual histories (Gintis 1980, 1984) and in the more institutionally focused ones (Fleck 2003). Given the silence of the secondary literature and the relative paucity of the written primary record, we are drawn to life histories. It is through these life histories that we can best examine the transformation of URPE, from an ecumenical late-1960s genesis to its fracture in the mid-1970s into a plurality of groups that began to lead separate existences.

One of the major, if not the major, schism that placed stress on the radical economics community was the divide between men and women.

22. At the same time, it was lamented that the conferences were not intellectually productive (Hinckley 1969).

23. See Mata 2005 for a tentative history of this period.

In 1969 a women's group was created in URPE (Weisskoff 1970), meeting occasionally in its first couple of years with little effect. It appears that the group was too diverse to develop a common discourse and program for action: "Some were members of URPE, and were concerned with discrimination both in URPE and within the economics profession. Others of us resented any obligation to become involved in what was our husband's or boyfriend's organization, not ours" (Howard 1970, 4). In 1971 at URPE's summer conference, the women's caucus came to the fore, demanding representation at the editorial board of URPE's scholarly journal, the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, and at its steering committee. The proposal was initially resisted by the men, and only after some dramatic debating was it accepted (for a report of the events, see Horowitz et al. 1971). How are we to understand this passionate division of opinion, this bitter dispute in an otherwise harmonious community of self-identifying radical economists?

Once again, we draw on the Nisonoff interview for answers. From the start of her interview, Nisonoff proposed to tell "the story of how women's liberation came to URPE," adding jokingly that "it wasn't pretty." Already in this phrasing we have hints of the structure of her story. It is "women's liberation" and not "women's issues" or "women's studies"; for Nisonoff and for the other participants in these events the origins of the divide were political, coming from the emergent women's liberation movement (see Evans 1980 and Morgan 1970).

In her interview, Nisonoff offered a complete and articulate narrative of this period:

There were two URPE chapters in the Boston area. . . . The two chapters are cooperating on running this conference in the fall of 1969 [the New England conference], and . . . the Harvard chapter decided, well Paddy [Patricia Quick] should work at the desk, and the MIT chapter decided that I should work at the desk. And this was a big mistake. . . . People should not just like assume these things, 'cause it's dangerous. So, in fact, at one point in that conference, Paddy and I just went to the ladies room and we didn't come back, during the business meeting, for like the better part of an hour.

And then . . . there were usually one, or two, or three women in any given place, [but] when I got to New Haven . . . we had about, between the wives . . . and the . . . graduate students we had about . . . six or eight women, eventually ten or twelve women in URPE. In the spring of

'71, six of us, URPErs, . . . rented a house together, 700 Fountain Street, and . . . URPE began to have a lot of meetings there as well. . . . we began to decide that you know, something needed to be done. And there were other groups of women in Boston, . . . and in New York . . . , and in Washington, D.C.

In this first part of her story, Nisonoff gives us an example of the sexist behavior of male URPErs, who picked the two women in the group for the dull tasks of receptionists. She also offers an explanation of how the otherwise divided women's caucus was able to organize for the 1971 protest, the explanation resting in the closely knit group of female graduate students at Yale University who began to share a house in 1970.

Nisonoff relates the events at the 1971 summer conference:

When we were at the summer conference, a woman . . . , now known as Tucker Farley, . . . who is in comparative literature . . . and the Modern Language Association had allowed graduate students in, on to the board of the MLA, to incorporate all these new social movements and their impact on the disciplines, within the Modern Language Association. And Tucker said that what we needed in the AEA and in URPE . . . [was] our own official women's caucus. And so we went off, into the woods, someplace, sat around on logs and talked about it, about twelve or fifteen of us, and we decided that we were going to propose three women, to join the editorial board, . . . and that . . . two would serve on the steering committee.

We went to one of the business meetings, and we said that we had these proposals and everybody starts mumbling and grumbling and giving us a lot of trouble. . . . And at a certain point I had run out of the things we had decided. So I said, well, "Excuse me but I need to go outside, with the other women who are making this proposal," but that isn't what happened. Every woman in the room pretty much got up and left, so all their wives and girlfriends went with us! So it's one thing when it's ten or twelve annoying women graduate students—there was no woman faculty at URPE—but it's quite another thing when every damn woman in the place goes out and stands outside and waits for us to say what we were gonna do!

But out in the dark, we were trying to decide, we are not backing down and how we are going to organize ourselves, and we do in fact, get women's caucus representation on to the steering committee, and that

becomes sort of the model for every other group that has tried to be represented, people of color, gay and lesbians.

The climax of the Nisonoff story is the summer conference and the women's protest. Its message is one of solidarity. It is a noneconomist women's liberationist that gives women URPEs the idea for the protest and their demands. And it is thanks to the show of solidarity from the noneconomist women at the business meeting, by storming out with the economist women, that their demands were met.

The success of the 1971 protest signals in Nisonoff's narrative the beginning of the women's caucus as a functioning and vibrant group. In November 1971 the New Haven women ran a conference titled "Economic Perspectives on Women: Developing a Feminist Economics." Nisonoff recalls that three hundred people came to this conference, half of them academics and the other half activists: "People come from just all over the place and sleep on floors and, we have like thirty something panels, and . . . it's amazing!" She then adds:

One thing that happens . . . at this conference . . . is that we decide that we also have to confront the AEA for its sexist policies. And, so . . . Marion Hill and I go to Tobin and Paddy goes to Galbraith and in December 1971 the keynote speaker for the AEA is Joan Robinson and we were actually introduced to her. We're also given some help by . . . Caroline Shawbell, who was an institutionalist, but a feminist. And, David Gordon's mother Margaret Gordon, who was tenured. . . . Through these powerful connections, we get on to the agenda of the business meeting, the foundation of CSWEP [Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession].<sup>24</sup>

Two remarks ought to be made concerning Nisonoff's narrative. First, the structure of her story of the women's caucus mimics that of URPE's creation. Both are tales of shared political and personal commitments that culminate in the formation of a new organization. In both stories the new community announces itself by protesting the AEA: URPE in December 1969 and the women's caucus in 1971. Second, it is meaningful that in her interview Nisonoff was much more articulate in her narrative of these events than of others to which she had also been witness. It has been acknowledged that detailed recall in interview settings correlates with fre-

24. See "Minutes of the Annual Meeting" in issues 1–2 of the 1972 volume of the *American Economic Review*.

quent retelling or as a result of published memoirs (Lindee 1997, 43). This narrative is clearly an important one, one that has been retold to other women URPEers as the origin of their caucus.

Our focus in this section is on the fragmenting of the radical community in the 1970s. Nisonoff's narrative shows her experience of a new identity within URPE, that of the women URPEers. This new identity was a source of conflict, as the 1971 episode exemplifies. But the most important legacy of the events Nisonoff retells is that they led to the emergence of the women's caucus as an independent unit of action within URPE. Issues of the *Review of Radical Political Economics* soon appeared run by women's caucus collectives and dealing with women's issues (July 1972, Spring 1976, Fall 1977, Summer 1980, Spring 1984, Fall–Winter 1991, and Fall 2001). When URPE in 1972–73 turned to outreach work by promoting the writing of pamphlets for the public, a Women's Work Project was created to produce literature on women's issues (Keefe 1974). Women URPEers also began to build organizations that crossed over disciplinary boundaries with a shared commitment to women's liberation—one such organization was Marxism Feminist 1 (Petchesky 1979).

In the previous section we examined how in the late 1960s a community of radical economists was formed, mediated by the conflict that erupted on American campuses over the Vietnam War, by the URPE conferences and protests, and by the convivial atmosphere of the summer conference. In this section we have seen how new identities were being formed under the heading of radical economics. Women URPEers, increasingly conscious of the sexism of their male colleagues and increasingly closer to feminists in other disciplines, challenged the structures of URPE and carved out an institutional home for themselves within it.

### 3. What Is Hidden

The argument that we are advancing in this essay is that a *history* of heterodox economists and their communities is still to be written. We miss a story that makes sense of the academic lives and social activities of heterodox economists. We lack a narrative that successfully integrates agency and structure, the individual and the collective. Thus the kind of narrative we want is one that is chronological, has a plot that includes agency, and includes a historical ending that makes sense of the narrative (Elliott 2005). Hence from the perspective we are advancing here, the writing of heterodox economics' social history requires knowledge of the networks,

interpersonal relationships, and subjective perspectives of the individuals who made up, for example, radical economics. Often these connections and subjectivity are hidden from view. Submerged by the more dominant narrative of mainstream economics, they may not be discerned from the standard sources of historians of economics, the published scholarly literature. Our strategy has been to uncover the hidden social dimensions through life narratives.

We explored life narratives to find the imprint of subjectivity. In interviews, radical economists recalled with intensity the collective experiences they shared in protesting the war in Vietnam, racism, and the political commitments of the economics profession, and in organizing events for URPE. They downplayed an identity constituted of shared disciplinary or research interests, ranked secondary to the emotional and convivial bounds. We interpret this discrimination as valuing a complex of political, affective, and intellectual experiences as the source of the radical community's identity.

Similarly, differences within URPE emerged from new solidarities and new experiences of conflict staged in the early 1970s. What is salient in our discussion of the divide between URPE men and women is not so much which aspects were selected for mention but the narrative's form. There is a seamless progression from women's grievances to their organizing and their ultimate self-determination in URPE. We are faced with a well-rehearsed narrative, one that suggests the inevitable outcome of the women's scission.

Through a life narrative, be it conveyed in an interview, autobiography, or oral history, we can study an individual's sense of self and location in society. The narrative selects and organizes the events and meanings that bound an individual to a community. We also unearth traces of change in the community, of solidarities broken and new ones established. How this social and cultural history fits with more standard historiographical practices in the history of economics is unclear. Our study was tentative and did not seek to establish a definite history of URPE. Further research is warranted in studying the gamut of radical subjectivities. Nor did we attempt to match in detail our narrative of shifting identities to existing intellectual histories. Indeed, how have changes to the radical community, for instance, with the emergence of the women's caucus, reshaped theoretical research? This is an empty canvas, but one that we can fill with the colors of enthusiasm, commitment, imagination, and a deep respect for the many different lives that inhabit the economics profession.

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