

# From Social to Mathematical Science: Transforming Economics at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1956–85

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Postwar French economics has been shaped by the division of higher education into the *grandes écoles* and the universities, where, in general, economists endorsed opposite methodological approaches (Arena 2000). After World War II, the teaching of economics was marginal in *grandes écoles* such as the École polytechnique, the École des mines, and the École des ponts et chaussées, as well as the École d'application de l'INSEE—renamed the École nationale de la statistique et de l'administration économique (ENSAE) in 1960. Those schools mostly provided students with engineering tools. They trained their elite students to work

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*History of Political Economy* 56:2 DOI 10.1215/00182702-11055046  
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within the French administration and public industries, where they learned economics on the job by applying sets of statistical and mathematical tools to practical problems. Once in administration, former students disseminated economic knowledge through research seminars and scientific articles (Bungener and Joël 1989). The approach of these “French marginalists” or “econometricians” aligned with US postwar neoclassicism (Drèze 1964).

Within universities, the situation was different. Originally created to train the administrative elite and jurists, law schools (*facultés de droit*) offered economics courses but economists had little, if any, autonomy (Le Van-Lemesle 2004: 259–86; Musselin 2007: 712). After World War II, law school courses were mostly devoted to law: economics courses represented no more than one-fifth of their curricula. Within law schools, so-called realist economists endorsed a factual and interdisciplinary approach based on sociological and empirical methods; they rejected mathematical and abstract approaches (see, e.g., Fourastié 1949). In law faculties, realist economics represented the mainstream between 1945 and 1970.<sup>1</sup> From the 1970s, the realist approach lost ground in universities at the expense of a model-oriented approach—based on a set of technical, statistical, and mathematical tools—that had been prevalent in the United States since the 1950s (Morgan and Rutherford 1998). Within historiography, that episode remains mostly understudied.<sup>2</sup> Philippe Steiner (2000) analyzes that transformation by focusing on the academic journal the *Revue économique*; Marion Fourcade (2009) shows that French administration shaped the identity of economics, but her analysis stops at the period when French economists began to endorse international standards. Likewise, Le Merrer (2005) details the consequences of the May 1968 social revolt on the teaching of economics in France but pays little attention to research methods.

We can gain a better understanding of that transformation by considering the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS). Today, the EHESS is one of the leading social science schools in France. The work of its faculty represents almost 10 percent of the cited sources in French social science academic publications.<sup>3</sup> Some of its members have achieved

1. Realist economists chaired half of the committees that granted full professorship positions (Facchini 2015), and their figurehead, François Perroux, held the most prestigious academic position since he was appointed at the Collège de France in 1955.

2. For instance, the case of France was not investigated in the special issue of *HOPE* titled *The Post-1945 Internationalization of Economics* (Coats 1996).

3. Report of the Cour des comptes, March 3, 2021, <https://www.ccomptes.fr/sites/default/files/2021-05/20210525-refere-S2021-0059-EHESS.pdf>, accessed January 17, 2023.

international recognition and even became major figures in their discipline: Fernand Braudel in history, Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, Pierre Bourdieu in sociology, and Roland Barthes in linguistics. In 1947, when it was created as the Sixth Section of the *École pratique des hautes études* (it was renamed the EHESS in 1975) following the combined efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation and the French director of higher education, Pierre Auger, it was meant to help the institutional emancipation of the social sciences by providing a place for advanced research.<sup>4</sup> Since its creation, the EHESS has claimed to place interdisciplinary approaches at the core of its scientific identity. Often described as the institutional base of the *Annales* historians (Les *Annales* 2020; Coutau-Bégarie 1989: 275–91; Mazon 1988; Tournès 2013: 323–31), its first four directors—Lucien Febvre, Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, and François Furet—were Annalists. Yet, it should be remembered that the institution’s original agenda was centered on the teaching of economics, which was then deemed inadequate in law schools. When founded, the institution appointed realist economists from law schools to enhance interactions with other social sciences and provided economic training with a view to supporting postwar reconstruction (Benest 2022: 330–37). With such an agenda, the EHESS hardly seemed hospitable to mathematical economics; however, during the 1970s, mathematical economics, inspired by the work of MIT economists, began to supplant the realist approach within the EHESS.

In what follows, I describe the chaotic journey of economics within the EHESS, paying special attention to the political and methodological agendas of economists and social scientists. In the first section, I argue that during Fernand Braudel’s tenure as president of the EHESS (1956–72), economists who defended an approach based on empiricism and interactions with other social sciences suffered harsh treatment. As shown in section 2, the election of Jacques Le Goff as president in 1972 helped school members grasp the dire situation of economics and eventually helped improve it. Finally, in section 3, I show how the scientific and political agendas of the EHESS’s third president and historian, François Furet, paved the way for the autonomization of economics within the EHESS and how the school’s economists used their nascent autonomy to mathematize the discipline.

4. As the French academic system focused on professional training, it did not offer a place for the social sciences—which were perceived as useless for professional training—and it was not equipped to conduct advanced research. To correct these two shortcomings, the French government created complementary institutions, such as the *École pratique des hautes études* and the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS) (Clark 1973).

## 1. Economics under Braudel

Following the death of the founder of the journal the *Annales*, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel took over as the head of the Sixth Section in 1956. Even if Braudel had been interested in studying economic facts, he had a poor opinion of economists. He did not reject the discipline of economics entirely. Instead, he meant to promote a certain form of economics that met the needs of historians. For example, in the mid-1950s, in a lecture at the Collège de France, he pointed out that François Perroux's work had "made the most significant and innovative contribution to the reflection on the historical forms of spatial asymmetry" (Gemelli 1995: 114).

Before he was the head of the Sixth Section, Braudel suggested that economists follow the scientific agenda of the historians in the first issue of the *Revue économique*—the journal created by Sixth Section economists: in his view, history, together with sociology, was the only discipline that studied all aspects of human beings and societies.<sup>5</sup> Some ten years later, in his major methodological article on the *longue durée*, Braudel again pointed to the mistake of economists in focusing on the contemporary economic situation without historical perspective.<sup>6</sup> Braudel also used his position as editor of the *Annales* to organize his attacks against economics, as when he published Jean Domarchi's "Against Econometrics" in 1958. At the time, Domarchi was teaching at the Sixth Section; his article took issue with the mathematical approach in economics and proposed a historical approach instead. Commissioned by Braudel, this was the first article in economic theory published in the *Annales* since Febvre's death in 1956.<sup>7</sup> Although it was not presented as such, the article was meant as

5. "Historians, we who, with sociologists, are the *only ones* who have a right to investigate *everything* that concerns man" (Braudel 1950: 44). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French are my own.

6. "It only rarely happens, on the other hand, with economists, who are imprisoned in a very short present. They seldom go further back than 1945, and they go forward in terms of plans and forecasts into an immediate future of several months, several years at the very most. I claim that all economic thought is trapped in this time bind. They tell the historians that it is their task to study periods earlier than 1945, in search of ancient economies. But in this way, they deprive themselves of a marvelous field for observation, abandoning it of their own volition, while not denying its value. The economist has fallen into the groove of running after analysis of the present on behalf of governments" (Braudel 1958: 736, based on the translation by Wallerstein [Braudel 2009]).

7. "As regards the article you were kind enough to ask me to write for the *Annales*, I propose to submit it to you in October 1955." Knowing that Domarchi would not publish another paper before that date in the *Annales*, we can conclude that "Against Econometrics" responded to Braudel's request. Domarchi to Braudel, January 28, 1955, Fonds secrétariat direction EHESS (Braudel)—20180531/2, Dossier de candidature Domarchi, Archives nationales (AN).

a response to a contribution by Victor Rouquet La Garrigue (1954)—also a teacher in the Sixth Section—in the same journal, in which Rouquet La Garrigue argued that econometrics and mathematics improved the theoretical analysis of economic facts and the understanding of concrete business matters. In his responding article, Domarchi objected that that approach studied economic facts in isolation from other social facts and emphasized the short term. In other words, it ignored the historical dynamics necessary to understand the present. Moreover, according to Domarchi, some economic assumptions needed to be historically grounded.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to taking issue with economics, Braudel encouraged alternative approaches by creating the Rockefeller-funded Area Studies program.<sup>9</sup> In 1957, the anthropologist Georges Balandier created the Centre d'études africaines within Braudel's Area Studies program. Among the anthropologists of the Sixth Section, the center especially supported those who studied economic facts. Balandier recruited a new generation of anthropologists, among whom was Claude Meillassoux, regarded as “the founder of French economic anthropology” (Copans 2005: para. 1). Upon returning to France, following the receipt of a master's degree in economics at the University of Michigan, Meillassoux worked with the administration of the Marshall Plan and began training in anthropology. At the Sixth Section, he attended the seminar run by Balandier, who hired him in 1958. Two years later, Meillassoux (1960) published a Marxist analysis of economic phenomena in traditional societies. Published in the *Cahiers d'études africaines*—the journal of Balandier's research center—the article was “immediately greeted in France as a turning point in anthropology” (Şaul 2005: 754).

Another economic anthropologist of note was Maurice Godelier, who passed the *agrégation* in philosophy in 1959, then became interested in economics (Bert 2007).<sup>10</sup> From 1960, he studied economics in the law faculties of Paris and at the Centre d'études et de programmation économique

8. The theory of choice “is only a *resultant*, the product of an earlier process of a *historical* (I said: *historical*, not *sociological*) type which can only be theorized with *historical concepts*” (Domarchi 1958: 314).

9. The Area Studies program was created with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1955. Initially reluctant to support it, the foundation agreed to fund it when Braudel assured the foundation that no research would be conducted that advocated communist ideology—namely, a Marxist approach—and when he reoriented the research subject toward areas of communist influence (Russia and China) at the expense of the Islamic and Eastern area, as initially envisaged (see Benest 2019: 161–70).

10. The *agrégation de philosophie* is the national examination that certifies philosophy teachers for high school instruction.

(CEPE) directed by Edmond Malinvaud. The experience was short-lived, however: “After the first term I quit,” Godelier said in 2014. “It was so stupid.”<sup>11</sup> At the CEPE, Godelier was surrounded by engineers. He built models and focused on what he described as “economic calculations.” In addition, he read the three volumes of Marx’s *Capital*, as well as Keynes, Walras, Pareto, and Schumpeter (Lasowski 2016: 98), while writing articles on the notion of structure in *Capital* for *Economie & politique*—the French Communist Party’s economic journal.

In late 1960, Godelier introduced himself to Braudel. Because of his Marxist inclinations and his membership in the Communist Party, Godelier felt that he did not have much chance of obtaining a position at the Sixth Section. However, during the interview, Godelier convinced Braudel to hire him by pointing out the lack of economic anthropology in France and by explaining that after doing abstract economics at the CEPE, he hoped to study “concrete economic realities.”<sup>12</sup> After two years as *chef de travaux* (research assistant), Godelier was promoted to assistant professor under the supervision of Claude Lévi-Strauss (Lasowski 2016: 99). It was during that period that UNESCO sent Godelier to Mali to study the effects of planning in that country while it was transitioning to socialism (Bert 2007). When he came back, he published “Objet et méthodes de l’anthropologie économique” (1965), in which he endorsed a Marxist approach and challenged the universality of the rationality concept.

The Sixth Section’s Area Studies program provided the institutional base for the Marxist approach in French economic anthropology, an approach that Meillassoux and Godelier endorsed. Inspired by structural anthropology, they sought to overcome the methodological opposition between formalists and substantivists (see Mirowski 2000)—two approaches that Godelier (1965: 61) and Meillassoux (1960) rejected. Their works were not merely directed against anthropologists—they also targeted economists.

Both men argued that although economics could understand “modern industrial, market or planned societies,” it was unable to understand traditional societies (Godelier 1965: 32).<sup>13</sup> Marxist anthropologists sought to

11. Maurice Godelier (anthropologist, EHESS), interview with *Période*, November 12, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqlFeXGeYH0>, accessed January 17, 2023.

12. Godelier, interview with *Période*.

13. “The theories of political economy are not enough to explain a primitive economy because this one is socially more complex, and the uncritical application of these theories obscures more than it enlightens the primitive economy, because it provides only superficial resemblances and masks the significant differences” (Godelier 1965: 76). “The simpler a

subject economics to “a general theory of the various social forms of human economic activity” (32).<sup>14</sup> But economists remained indifferent to these attacks and proposals. For example, Godelier’s bestseller, *Rationalité et irrationalité en économie*, was not reviewed in economics journals, including the rather pluralist *Revue économique*.

Even though the main patron of the Area Studies program—the Rockefeller Foundation—was not favorable to the Marxist approach, Braudel endorsed the criticisms of Godelier and Meillassoux against the economists and never missed a chance to undermine the latter. Among the economists, André Piatier, Georges-Théodule Guilbaud, and Charles Bettelheim in particular suffered from Braudel’s dislike of economics. Trained as an economist at the law faculty, Piatier was director of the Economic Studies Department of the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) when he was elected by the Assemblée des enseignants as *directeur d’études* of the Sixth Section in 1948.<sup>15</sup> He endorsed a pluri-disciplinary and empirical approach. Less than five years after the implementation of the Area Studies program, Piatier lamented that economics was excluded from the program. The Area Studies agenda was presented as interdisciplinary, but in practice there was little interdisciplinarity. Piatier noted that the Area Studies program tends to “dismember the field of study between economists, sociologists, and geographers,” which he perceived as a form of disciplinary imperialism of other disciplines.<sup>16</sup> Although he did not name the disciplines in question, it is clear that history was his target. So as to strengthen economics, Piatier attempted to reinstate the Sixth Section’s interdisciplinary ambition by

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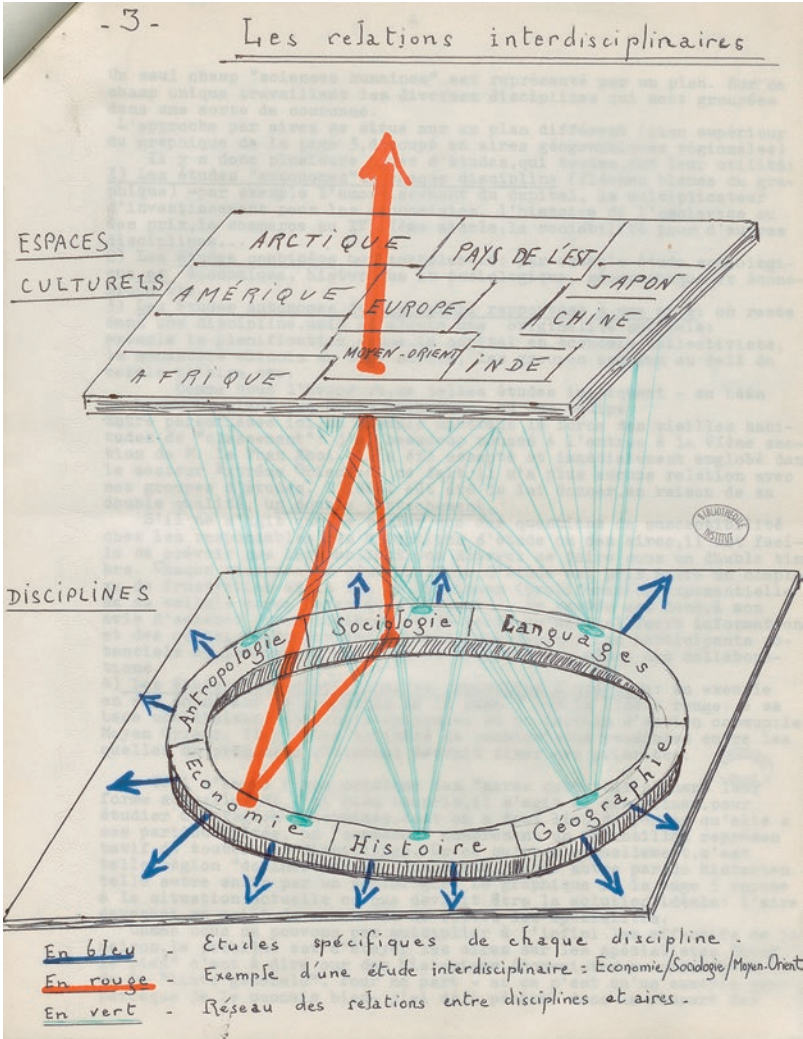
society is, the less it is possible to isolate the economic from the other elements of social life and the more complex the analysis of an apparently economic mechanism will be, since the whole social configuration is directly present at the heart of this mechanism” (77).

14. “By seeking to make political economy the general theory of economics, we end up losing sight of the sociological and historical dimension of the facts, transforming a social fact into a natural fact, denying the facts observed in primitive societies or distorting them, and even deceiving ourselves about the real functioning of our own economic system” (Godelier 1965: 78).

15. The Sixth Section had a rather idiosyncratic hiring process. All *directeurs d’études*—gathered as the Assemblée des enseignants—regardless of their disciplinary background, elected their colleagues even though in practice bargaining power between disciplines played a dominant role. Disciplines with few members had to forge alliances with other disciplines or relied on the board of the school to get their candidates elected. This recruitment system, while implying a hierarchy of the disciplines, encouraged interdisciplinary dialogue, as candidates had to explain their research to nonspecialists.

16. André Piatier, “Note sur le fonctionnement de la VIe section,” Ms 8510 (91), Archives de Fernand Braudel, Bibliothèque de l’Institut.





**Figure 1.** Drawing by André Piatier depicting the interaction between the social sciences, 1961. Note by Piatier, November 14, 1961, Archives Braudel, Correspondance de Piatier, Archives de l'Académie Française.

proposing a new organization of disciplines. He illustrated his proposal as shown in figure 1.

Piatier's proposal was meant to attract resources: the budget devoted to his research was decreasing due to his exclusion from the Area Studies program. But, in practice, the effects of his proposal were limited. The



document, annotated as “confidential” in Braudel’s papers, was not discussed in the faculty assembly; one can therefore assume that it was not widely circulated, which partly explains its modest impact. Because his initiative failed, Piatier had to seek new funding opportunities outside of the Sixth Section. To do so, he created new research centers that advocated a pluralist and interdisciplinary economics.<sup>17</sup> For instance, among the many research programs within the Centre d’étude des techniques économiques modernes (CETEM), the program on Iran was illustrative of the interdisciplinarity that in principle should have formed the agenda of the Area Studies program—but in practice did not.<sup>18</sup> Piatier’s academic tribulations reflected his desire to maintain a dialogue between economics and other social sciences.

The mathematically trained economist Georges-Théodule Guilbaud adopted the same strategy. Unlike Piatier, Guilbaud represented the engineering branch of French economics, whose most famous representatives were Maurice Allais and Edmond Malinvaud. Elected as a fellow of the Econometric Society in 1951, Guilbaud had a strong interest in game theory and operations research. He taught at the École d’application de l’INSEE (Barbut 2008). When he was appointed at the Sixth Section in 1955, Guilbaud was considered a very promising researcher by Clemens Heller—Braudel’s associate—who thought he could help strengthen economics within the section.<sup>19</sup> But it was not long before Guilbaud saw the Sixth Section as a hostile place for economists and decided to establish a research center outside the section at the Institut statistique de l’Université de Paris.

Other economists, like Charles Bettelheim, met a similar fate. Trained as philosopher, Bettelheim began studying economics while writing his PhD on Soviet planning. Following Bettelheim’s completion of his

17. The Centre d’étude du développement économique (CEDE) and the Inter-centre de recherche sur les techniques économiques modernes (IRTEM) were united within the Centre d’étude des techniques économiques modernes (CETEM) in 1966.

18. Following a study mission in Iran and Afghanistan in late 1966, the ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs funded Piatier to study “the structuring of the territory and the development of the Iranian economic space” and to direct “forecasting work for 20 years.” Document titled “Projet n°4,” February 1967, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier CETEM—note rapport correspondances, Archives EHESS.

19. “The brains of the Centre [d’études économique—the economics research center of the Sixth Section] is *Guilbaud*. CH [Clemens Heller] reported that everyone respects Guilbaud and if anyone can bring peace and harmony, he is undoubtedly the man.” Interview with Heller, June 14, 1955, Kenneth W. Thompson Diaries—1955, Rockefeller Foundation Archives (RFA)—Rockefeller Archives Center (RAC).

doctorate at the University of Caen in 1939, the Vichy government denied him the right to apply for an academic position because he was Jewish. Like Piatier, the Assemblée des enseignants elected him as *directeur d'études* of the Sixth Section in 1948. There he conducted theoretical and empirical research on planning in communist countries and used his expertise in many Third World countries, such as Cuba and India. Because he saw his research as a demonstration “that economic calculation is possible in a socialist economy and that planning does not necessarily entail dictatorship and arbitrariness” (Denord and Zunigo 2005: 16), he conducted interdisciplinary research and studied, for example, “the current relationship between economic planning systems and the evolution of social structures.”<sup>20</sup> His program was well suited to the orientations of Area Studies, so in 1960 he requested affiliation with the latter program in order to develop its research center.<sup>21</sup> Despite the opposition of economists in the Sixth Section, Braudel agreed to associate Bettelheim’s research center with Area Studies, which resulted in its transformation into the Centre d’études de planification socialiste.<sup>22</sup> Only a year later, however, Bettelheim considered that move a mistake and asked to be returned to the Division of Economic Research.<sup>23</sup>

Bettelheim’s decision was the result of repeated disappointments with Braudel. First, Braudel had denied funding for a new quarterly journal of interdisciplinary studies coedited with Jacques Berque and devoted to development and planning research, even though the journal fitted perfectly with the interdisciplinary approach of Area Studies.<sup>24</sup> Second, when

20. Document titled “Programme de travail du groupe de recherche sur la planification et les structures,” February 3, 1962, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier Centre d’études des méthodes socialistes de planification, Archives EHESS.

21. “The purpose of the Centre is to study the problems and techniques of socialist planning on the basis of theoretical work and practical experience. The work of the Centre will be carried out in a spirit of interdisciplinary research and will require the collaboration not only of economists, but also of sociologists, geographers, specialists in transport problems, urban planners, etc.” Document titled “Programme de travail du centre d’études de planification socialiste,” November 20, 1960, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier Centre d’études des méthodes socialistes de planification, Archives EHESS.

22. Perroux to Braudel, June 17, 1960, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier Centre d’études des méthodes socialistes de planification, Archives EHESS.

23. Bettelheim to Braudel, June 16, 1961, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier Centre d’études des méthodes socialistes de planification, Archives EHESS.

24. Berque and Bettelheim to Braudel, March 21, 1960, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier (1960–1966), Archives EHESS. Berque was a scholar of Islam whose expertise was the Maghreb.

Bettelheim tried in 1964 to organize a conference devoted to the study of agriculture-industry relations in socialist countries, Braudel was “absolutely opposed” to the symposium and refused to fund it.<sup>25</sup> Bettelheim complained that “the generalization of these discriminatory measures, of which I am not the only victim, could only reduce the scientific prestige of the Sixth Section both in France and abroad.”<sup>26</sup> It may be surmised that Braudel intended to reassure American philanthropic foundations because of Bettelheim’s communist inclinations (despite his distancing from the French Communist Party [Denord and Zunigo 2005]).

Braudel’s dislike of economics weakened its position within the Sixth Section. Between 1957, when the section elected the engineering economists Claude Gruson and Malinvaud, and 1972, when it elected Serge-Christophe Kolm and Henri Aujac, only six economists were elected among the 150 newly elected *directeurs d’études* at the Sixth Section. Whereas in the academic year 1959–60 economics represented more than 25 percent of the section’s teaching, with twenty-four out of the eighty-eight courses, in the academic year 1972–73 economics represented barely more than 10 percent of the courses taught in the section, with only seventeen courses—that is, 30 percent less than a decade earlier. Given their situation within the institution, economists had good reason to worry and to think of ways to improve their lot.

## 2. Which Identity for Economists?

During Braudel’s tenure from 1956 to 1972, higher education in France underwent significant changes. In 1960, a legislative decree implemented an economics degree within law faculties so that economists remained under the tutelage of jurists—owing to the absence of free-standing economics departments—while now being able to offer a complete training in economics and, as a result, a bona fide degree in the field.<sup>27</sup> The main breakthrough in higher education was the “Faure” reform that was passed

25. Braudel to Bettelheim, January 18, 1965, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier (1960–1966), Archives EHESS.

26. Bettelheim to Braudel, March 5, 1965, Fonds Velay, Carton 70 n°7—économie, Dossier (1960–1966), Archives EHESS.

27. Décret n° 60-843 du 6 août 1960 fixant le régime des études et des examens de première année en vue de la licence en droit et de la licence ès sciences économiques and Décret n° 60-844 du 6 août 1960 fixant le régime des études et des examens en vue de la licence ès sciences économiques, *Journal Officiel*, August 11, 1960, pp. 7507–9.

eight years later in November 1968, following the popular and student revolt in May. The idea was to renew the entire institutional framework of higher education by transforming the disciplinary-based faculties into universities (Charle and Verger 2015: 194–95). The universities themselves were composed of disciplinary-based departments—the *Unités d’enseignement et de recherche*. This reform was meant to provide universities with more autonomy and democratic decision-making processes by involving students and professors within the governing boards. In practice, the Faure reform weakened traditional professorial power while it “strengthene[d] the power of the supervisory ministries” (195).

The consequences of the Faure reform on the teaching of economics were not immediate. The reform’s creation of free-standing economics departments provided economists with full autonomy, but little changed with regard to teaching because a 1960 decree on economics teaching continued to apply. The transformation occurred five years later when other reforms enabled the government to reshape teaching programs, notably with the creation of the *DEUG* (a degree for second-year students) in 1973, the *troisième cycle* (a doctoral program) in 1974, and the *licence* (bachelor’s degree) and *maîtrise* (master’s degree) in 1975. By creating these degrees in all French universities, the government was able to homogenize economics teaching, resulting in “a standardization of economics teaching in France compared to foreign situations” (Le Merrer 2005). The Sixth Section followed the reform, but not without difficulty.

The Faure reform destabilized the Sixth Section, and its economists were the first to be affected. By taking control of the entire higher education system, the government abolished the special legal status of the Sixth Section. The latter was no longer able to appoint *directeurs d’études cumulant*—that is, *directeurs d’études* whose main appointment was in another institution.<sup>28</sup> To the extent that French economists were applying as *directeurs d’études cumulant*, the reform affected mostly economics. In addition, it should be noted that most economist *directeurs d’études* were getting close to retirement age.

In 1970, there were only fifteen economists among the some two hundred members of the section, and their average age was fifty-five (Godechot 2011: graph 6). In June 1970, the section’s Electoral Commission,

28. Unsigned letter from the National Education Ministry, May 22, 1969, Fonds Touchard, Dossier 6SP6 dossier 2—Réforme de l’enseignement supérieur 1964–1970, Archives de Sciences Po.

which reviewed the applications before the elections, was concerned about the ban on *directeurs d'études cumulants*.<sup>29</sup> The commissioners noticed the ban's impact on economists: "It would be appropriate to consider the formation of a group of economists, which has become indispensable since it will no longer be possible to appoint members of the Faculty of Law who have held multiple appointments."<sup>30</sup> During the Assemblée des enseignants, the economists Emile James, Jean Lhomme, Piatier, and Jean Weiller urged new appointments for economics. The economist Jean Méraud even asked for "the opening of a debate on the place of economics in the school."<sup>31</sup> Braudel's lip service notwithstanding, economists' complaints were ignored. Three weeks later, at the next Assemblée des enseignants, the economists reiterated their request and attacked the section's recruitment policy more directly. The economist Claude Gruson made it clear that "it is impossible, as far as economics is concerned, to limit oneself to a corps of *directeur d'études cumulants*," while Méraud warned "that the non-renewal of the *cumulants* will lead to the death of economic research."<sup>32</sup> Again, these admonitions did not result in any change: no economist was appointed in the elections of 1970 and 1971. While Henri Aujac's application was accepted in March 1972, it was merely because, as suggested by Braudel, it had "the advantage of not affecting the budget."<sup>33</sup>

In June 1972, Le Goff was elected president of the section with the support of Braudel, who had reached mandatory retirement age. Le Goff launched a broad consultation with the *directeurs d'études* about the future of the section. Piatier seized this opportunity to warn that the "place of economics in the teachings of the School . . . has become ridiculous."<sup>34</sup> He deplored that economics lacked resources within the section and that positions of *directeurs d'études* for economists had declined while positions for other social scientists had increased. Other economists might have been less direct, but they all pointed to the need

29. On the idiosyncratic hiring process of the EHESS, see n. 15.

30. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, June 5, 1970, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l'assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

31. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, June 5, 1970.

32. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, June 28, 1970, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l'assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

33. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, March 12, 1972, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l'assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

34. Piatier to Le Goff, September 12, 1972, Fonds Velay, Dimab 25, Dossier Réponse Piatier: situation de l'école et perspective (1972), Archives EHESS.

for additional resources. For example, Lhomme “believe[d] that a strengthening of this sector [economics] is indispensable” because of past and future retirements of economists (Jean Marchal, André Marchal, E. James, and J. Lhomme).<sup>35</sup> With a view to facilitating new recruitments, all economists—with the exception of François Perroux—called for the development of interdisciplinary research, which followed the scientific agenda of the section and implied association with the Area Studies program.<sup>36</sup> In the eyes of economists, enhancing advanced interdisciplinary research should also play a role in distinguishing the section’s economics from that of the new economics department within the universities.<sup>37</sup> Despite the efforts of the section’s economists, other social scientists at the section remained mostly indifferent to what was happening to their colleagues in economics.

The consultation that Le Goff launched led to the organization of the Royaumont symposium of May 19–20, 1973, which focused on the question of interdisciplinarity within the section. The organizers produced a preliminary document for discussion that ignored the concerns of the economists who requested new recruits; only six economists (Aujac, Isac Chiva, Jean Fourastié, Georges-Théodule Guilbaud, Morazé, and Ignacy Sachs) were present of the fifty-one participants, whereas the historians had sixteen representatives.<sup>38</sup> The Royaumont meeting did not address the problems facing economics. Some participants regretted this omission as they believed that the situation of economics within the section was “a basic issue.”<sup>39</sup>

Despite the symposium report’s assertion that “the goal of this meeting . . . was not at all a question of formulating a scientific policy, even less of deciding on measures,” the participants requested the creation of

35. Document titled “Avis de Lhomme,” July 9, 1972, Fonds Velay, Carton–Art 1: Histoire, organisation et statuts de l’EPHE, Dossier réponse directeur de centre, Archives EHESS.

36. For instance, Weiller claimed that he had “made it his duty not to neglect any possibility of maintaining the dialogue with other disciplines, not only economic but also historical and sociological.” Weiller to Le Goff, September 27, 1972, Fonds Velay, Carton–Art 1: Histoire, organisation et statuts de l’EPHE, Dossier Réponse directeur de centre, Archives EHESS.

37. Within faculties, a new generation of economists seized the opportunities offered by the Faure reform to introduce mathematical training and internationalize the discipline, e.g., at Strasbourg (Dos Santos Ferreira, Ege, and Rivot 2020).

38. Document titled “Présentation des dossiers,” n.d., Fonds Marzocchi, Carton 153 EHE 15, Dossier Colloque de Royaumont, Inventaire 1972–1973, Archives EHESS.

39. Report of the Royaumont symposium, n.d., Fonds Marzocchi, Carton 153 EHE 15, Dossier Colloque de Royaumont, Archives EHESS.



research groups and graduate degrees based on an interdisciplinary approach. Among the various themes suggested, only one concerned economics. As suggested by Sachs, who did not consider himself an economist, an interdisciplinary research agenda was proposed that dealt with the “deep crisis of Economics: critique of the current state of political economy.” The theme was described as “fit[ting] well into the agenda of the School.”<sup>40</sup>

Even if the Royaumont symposium did not provide solutions for economics, changes occurred in late 1973, after Le Goff asked the economists to describe their discipline’s situation within the section. Whereas he first believed that the section was no longer capable of providing degrees in economics, Aujac later revised his opinion and said that he wished the section could raise the standards of its economics training.<sup>41</sup> Other economists had divided opinions about the future of the discipline. Even if most economists—such as Victor Rouquet La Garrigue and Piatier—argued that economic research should be anchored in the section’s agenda by focusing on concrete aspects and taking an interdisciplinary approach, the newly appointed economist Serge-Christophe Kolm proposed that economics be reconsidered in view of international standards. He pointed out the “weak point of the project . . . : this program will probably not be able to be the object of a broad interdisciplinary adhesion within the Sixth Section, because of the use of mathematical language, which is an unavoidable characteristic of modern advanced economic theory.”<sup>42</sup>

In mid-1974, Sixth Section economists wrote two reports: Jean-Pierre Delilez focused on the discipline’s orientation and supported the preservation of interaction between economists and other social scientists, while Henri Aujac addressed economics training within the section. Confirming the difficulties of providing basic economics training, Aujac encouraged advanced training in economics for future researchers.<sup>43</sup> When the two

40. Report of the Royaumont symposium.

41. Document titled “Remarques et proposition concernant la recherche économique à l’E.P.H.E.,” December 4, 1973, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l’assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS; Aujac to Le Goff, November 22, 1973, Fonds Velay, Carton 82 n°60-Enseignement, Archives EHESS; “Réflexion sur l’avenir de l’économie,” by Aujac, February 24, 1974, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l’assemblée des enseignants; minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, Archives EHESS.

42. Kolm to Le Goff, December 21, 1973, Fonds Velay, Carton 82 n°60-Enseignement, Archives EHESS.

43. Minutes of Commission scientifique provisoire meeting, June 17, 1974, Commission scientifique provisoire, Fonds Velay, Dimab 31, Archives EHESS.

reports were debated within the section, economists were confirmed in these views by their colleagues. For instance, among the research directions that were considered, one focused on “the need for economists to be in contact with other social scientists.”<sup>44</sup> This interdisciplinary agenda was also supported by Morazé, who defended the historical legacy of the Sixth Section’s founders after Braudel’s retirement.<sup>45</sup> In 1975, during the January *Assemblée des enseignants*, which confirmed the transformation of the Sixth Section as EHESS, Morazé reminded participants that the original intention of the founders was to bring together all the social sciences: “There are examples of institutions devoted to economics and combining them with the social sciences (the ‘London School’ among others); *we are, in the era of econometrics, the unique example of the opposite process. When the Sixth Section was born, it wanted to eradicate harmful divisions like this one.*”<sup>46</sup>

Just a few weeks earlier, on December 20, 1974, Le Goff had submitted a certification request to the *Conseil national de l’enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (CNESER), which, since its creation by the Faure reform, provided consultative opinions for certifying all postgraduate and PhD teaching programs with a view to standardizing the higher education system.<sup>47</sup> In his application, Le Goff requested agreement for twenty-eight postgraduate and doctoral programs, including only one in economics. The project for the creation of MBA and doctoral programs in “economics and social sciences” gathered all the economists of the section—from the economist-engineers (Malinvaud, Gruson) to the traditional socio-realist economists (Piatier, Bettelheim)—under the supervision of Aujac. Interestingly, the training program focused on the interactions between economics and other social sciences; it suggested that, within the Sixth Section, Kolm’s opinion about the future of economics was hardly dominant.

The three main themes of the program were the “study and economic interpretation of cultural and social phenomena; [the] contribution of

44. Minutes of Commission scientifique provisoire meeting, June 17, 1974.

45. Morazé was the main actor behind the creation of the section in 1947.

46. Minutes of *Assemblée des enseignants* meeting, January 26, 1975 (emphasis added), Fonds Général, *Compte rendu de l’assemblée des enseignants*, Archives EHESS.

47. It was consulted on credit allocations and “makes all proposals and gives all opinions on projects relating to the conditions for obtaining national diplomas . . . and the establishment of common rules for higher education.” Article 9, *Loi n°68-978 du 12 novembre 1968 d’orientation de l’enseignement supérieur*, *Journal Officiel*, November 13, 1968, p. 10580.

Economics to other Social Sciences; [and the] contribution of other Social Sciences to Economics.”<sup>48</sup> The themes ranged from econometrics and statistical methods to distributional economics or economics and space. For the postgraduate and PhD programs to be implemented, CNESER had to approve them. But CNESER rejected the proposal, stating that “the coherence of the research group [wa]s very weak, the work of the research directors focusing on different fields.”<sup>49</sup> In the eyes of the EHESS’s director, any other project would estrange economics from other social sciences and threaten the interdisciplinary agenda of the institution.<sup>50</sup> In agreement that the training program was the only one in line with the institution’s interdisciplinary agenda, the Assemblée des enseignants refused to revise it and resubmitted the program almost unchanged.<sup>51</sup> Once again, the project was rejected.

By rejecting the project because it lacked coherence, the CNESER also rejected a pluralist identity for economics. Following that decision, the members of the Sixth Section discussed the matter at the Scientific Board, which interestingly did not include economists. For the sociologist Alain Touraine, “the urgency in this matter [wa]s to ‘de-economize’ economics.”<sup>52</sup> While Godelier considered that “the School has ‘missed’ economics, it should not ‘miss’ the critique of economics.”<sup>53</sup> The Scientific Board decided to create a working group on economics with no economist participants. In March 1976, Touraine—in collaboration with Godelier—wrote a “report to the scientific council on economic studies at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales.” Surprisingly, he recommended that “at least five new *directeurs d’études* [economists] be recruited during the next few years.”<sup>54</sup>

48. Fonds de l’enseignement supérieur–19810341/68, Dossier économie et sciences sociales, AN.

49. Fonds de l’enseignement supérieur–19810341/68.

50. Document titled “Demande d’habilitation à la délivrance d’un Doctorat de 3<sup>ème</sup> cycle Economie et sciences sociales,” April 1975, Fonds de l’enseignement supérieur–19810341/68, Dossier économie et sciences sociales, AN.

51. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, April 27, 1975, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l’assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

52. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, June 11, 1975, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l’assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

53. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, June 11, 1975.

54. Report for the Conseil scientifique about economic training at EHESS by Alain Touraine (rapport au conseil scientifique sur les études d’économie à l’école des hautes études en sciences sociales), March 1976, Fonds Général, conseil scientifique, Archives EHESS.

### 3. The Internationalization of EHESS Economists: Replicating MIT Economics

The EHESS brought in new hires even before the Touraine report was released. Between 1970 and 1975, the institution elected six economists. Three former assistants—Jean-Pierre Delilez, Françoise Bourquelot, and Jean Coussy—were promoted *directeurs d'études* together with three outsiders: Christian Sautter, Kolm, and Aujac. Trained in law school, Aujac supported interactions with the other social sciences. Trained in an engineering school, Sautter (2012: 183) also advocated for interactions with the other social sciences, even if his main interest was in modeling. Finally, Kolm had an international background. Following his engineering training at Polytechnique, Allais recruited him as an assistant at the École des mines. Between 1963 and 1969, Kolm was a research assistant at Harvard University and then an assistant professor at Stanford University. He introduced the welfare economics literature to French economists following his return to France in 1972.<sup>55</sup>

These three economists agreed on the need for interactions with other social sciences, but each of them had a different understanding of why this was needed. They “represented three options for the renewal of economics and they played, or tried to play, a role in the transformation of economics by voicing different types of direction” (Godechot 2011: para. 27): Aujac endorsed the traditional approach of EHESS economists like Piatier; Kolm pursued the engineering tradition of French economics; and Sautter stood in the middle as a representative of the emerging school of thought known as the École de la régulation. The diverse profile of the recruits must be understood in light of the disagreements within the Sixth Section and the inability of the EHESS’s board to form a clear idea of economic research.

The Touraine report, for instance, favored hiring in economics to cover future retirements but did not say anything about the profiles of future economists brought on board. Touraine noted a contradiction between the need to achieve international standards and the need for interactions between economics and other social sciences, but refused to choose: “The

55. In 1971, one year before his election as an assistant to the Sixth Section, Kolm published *Justice et équité*, an important contribution to welfare economics (Kolm [1971] 1972). On Kolm and the theory of justice in France, see Hauchecorne 2011.

only solution is to progress on both sides at once.”<sup>56</sup> That was a difficult task because most economists who endorsed international standards had little interest in interacting with other social scientists. It was the first time that a noneconomist had envisaged the appointment of economists who endorsed international standards—and that was a large concession since Touraine had always supported the primacy of interdisciplinary interactions.<sup>57</sup>

In practice, EHESS social scientists were also limited by their lack of expertise in economic research. In March 1976, the Scientific Board discussed the Touraine report once more. The supporters of interdisciplinary economics opposed the advocates of modeling and internationalized economics. President Le Goff concluded the board’s discussion by advocating the election of “internationally oriented” economists.<sup>58</sup> However, when he had to list three economists for the next election, Le Goff did not follow his own recommendation: he selected only one economist who endorsed international standards, Lionel Stoléru. Trained as an engineer at the École polytechnique, Stoléru had completed his PhD at Stanford University under the supervision of Kenneth Arrow. The other candidates—Louis Puiseux and Jacques Attali—had no international profile.<sup>59</sup> The outlook of economics remained uncertain: the EHESS had chosen to recruit economists, but its members did not agree on which economic approach to support. The next appointments were crucial for the future of economics at the school.

For the upcoming election for *directeur d’études*, Kolm presented a new candidate, the Franco-American Georges de Ménil. De Ménil had spent the past two years at INSEE, where he worked on the short-term economic forecasting model Metric. Before that, he had completed his

56. Report for the Conseil scientifique about economic training at EHESS by Alain Touraine (rapport au conseil scientifique sur les études d’économie à l’école des hautes études en sciences sociales), March 1976, Fonds Général, conseil scientifique, Archives EHESS.

57. Godechot (2011: para. 29) explains that “this evolution was probably due to long conversations with Serge-Christophe Kolm.”

58. Minutes of the Conseil scientifique meeting, March 11, 1976, Fonds Général, conseil scientifique, Archives EHESS.

59. Although he was trained as an engineer at Polytechnique, Attali strongly rejected mathematical economics. The first generation of Sixth Section economists warmly received his book *L’anti-économie* (Attali and Guillaume 1974; see the review by Piatier [1974]). Puiseux was a business economist who worked at the economic research center of Electricité de France. If the service was created by Pierre Massé and Marcel Boiteux—two representatives of engineering and mathematical economics in the French tradition (see Yon 2014, 2020)—Puiseux was not engaged in international research.

PhD at MIT (1968) and worked as an assistant professor at Boston College (1968–70) and at Princeton University (1970–74).<sup>60</sup> His application diplomatically emphasized his work outside economics when he was a graduate student in anthropology (Wylie et al. 1968), but his methodological approach was clearly remote from those adopted in other social sciences because his research endorsed neo-Keynesianism and comparative analysis.<sup>61</sup>

At the *Assemblée des enseignants*, Kolm tried to convince the audience to vote for his candidate.<sup>62</sup> He reminded them of the situation of economics at the EHESS: “It is not a question of building the best possible department of economics in isolation; it is a question of starting from what the institution is: a combination of social sciences with a desire to establish solid interactions between them.”<sup>63</sup> From then on, he rhetorically and strategically redefined the divide within economics. While the actual divide seemed to be between economists who were connected to other social sciences and economists who were not, Kolm differentiated economists who conducted theoretical research from those who conducted empirical research and added that only the empirical economists “are in direct contact with other social disciplines (history, sociology, anthropology).”<sup>64</sup> He presented de Ménil as belonging to the latter branch. Kolm’s speech convinced the assembly: de Ménil was elected with the support of the EHESS board and all the economists except Coutin and Morazé.

De Ménil’s appointment was the first step toward the internationalization of economics at the EHESS. It resulted from the efforts of Kolm, who began to appear as the “mentor of the coming generation” (Bourguignon and Guesnerie 1996: 325). De Ménil’s profile represented this new orientation: a mathematical economist, trained in the United States, with an engineering background and interests beyond economics, who could publish in leading US economics journals. Equipped with similar skills, Jacques Mairesse was elected by the *Assemblée des enseignants* as

60. On the model Metric, see the 1977 special issue of the *Annales de l'inséé*.

61. Application letter from de Ménil, November 9, 1976, Fonds de la présidence Furet (EHESS)—19920572/5, Correspondances—De Ménil, AN.

62. On the idiosyncratic hiring process of the EHESS, again see n. 15.

63. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, January 16, 1977, Fonds Général, Compte rendu de l’assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

64. Minutes of Conseil des enseignants meeting, January 16, 1977.



*directeur d'études cumulant* in 1978.<sup>65</sup> His appointment confirmed the international orientation of economics that was strengthened by the historian Furet's election as the head of the EHESS in 1977.

Furet was elected by a wide margin: he was considered a highly skilled administrator owing to his work under Edgar Faure during the reform of higher education after 1968 (Prochasson 2013: 395–96). When he announced his application as director of the EHESS to the *Assemblée des enseignants*, Furet gave a rather conventional speech and did not mention economics. He meant to consolidate interdisciplinary research and to encourage scientific excellence.<sup>66</sup> However, Furet had a hidden agenda, which he detailed in a confidential note written one year after his election.<sup>67</sup> He “wishe[d] to make the analysis of the contemporary world the main axis of its [EHESS's] development.” His agenda relied on a political conception of the social sciences and implied internationalizing research and responding to the social demand for expertise. Furet considered his agenda as an opportunity to connect academics and political leaders. To that effect, he planned to create what would become the *Association pour le développement des sciences sociales* within the EHESS.<sup>68</sup> As soon as Furet drafted the project, contacts were made with political circles, and in April 1979 he presented the project to Prime Minister—and former academic economist—Raymond Barre, who promised his support.<sup>69</sup> The *Association pour le développement des sciences sociales* was also intended to “help the integration of French research in the international context.”<sup>70</sup> At the same time, social sciences other than economics produced at the EHESS were widely

65. Mairesse had engineering training from Polytechnique (1960–62) and ENSAE (1963–65), which he supplemented with a visiting scholarship at MIT in the early 1970s. He had also some interest in historical issues (Desrosières, Mairesse, and Volle 1976).

66. Document titled “Déclaration de Monsieur Furet à l'assemblée des enseignants de l'EHESS,” June 28, 1977, Fonds général, assemblée des enseignants, Archives EHESS.

67. Document classified as confidential in the archives and titled “Note de travail de Mr. Furet sur les lignes principales de développement de l'Ecole,” June 1978, Fonds Velay, Carton—Art 1: Histoire, organisation et statuts de l'EPHE, Archives EHESS.

68. Document titled “Note sur la création d'une Association pour le développement des Sciences sociales,” June 1980, Fonds de la présidence Furet (EHESS)—19920572/1, notes générales EHESS, AN.

69. Document titled “Note sur la politique scientifique, les moyens financiers et les perspectives d'avenir de l'EHESS,” September 17, 1979, Fonds de la présidence Furet (EHESS)—19920572/1, Dossier budgets, AN.

70. Document titled “Note sur la création d'une Association pour le développement des Sciences sociales.”

exported, especially to the United States. That was the case for French theory and literary studies (Dumont 2018) and for historical research from the *Annales*.<sup>71</sup>

Within the EHESS, Furet developed a research program called “politics,” which relied on and supported “the great cultural transformation which [was] the decline of Marxism in the political culture and in the social sciences” (Rosanvallon 1996: 301).<sup>72</sup> Thus, the hidden agenda of Furet took place within political debates concerning the promotion of a more market-oriented economy instead of one that was planned. Furet also meant to break out of the *Annales* hegemony over the social sciences, and this helped the consolidation of economics. Furet (1981: 113) deplored that the *Annales* was “simply managing a legacy” and that Annalists multiplied research topics without ensuring coherence of the historical discipline. He criticized the “hegemonic pretension of history on the social sciences: as if history alone, equipped with the partial knowledge provided by the neighboring disciplines, had vocation to present a unified vision of the human, under the name of ‘total history’ . . . [while] the idea of a ‘total history’ is ungraspable” (115). To Furet, real interdisciplinarity could not be achieved; therefore, the individual social sciences had to recover their autonomy to determine their “specialties or objects of research or approaches, without ever reaching a consensus of specialists” (114). Unlike Braudel, Furet supported the self-determination of the economists.<sup>73</sup> If Furet did not detail the place that economics should hold within his program, economics was often cited as an example of his

71. For instance, in the 1980s, there were three times as many subscribers to the *Annales* journal abroad as in France (Les *Annales* 2020: 533).

72. Besides the academic perspective, the majority of its participants pursued their political agenda by joining the Fondation Saint-Simon, created by Furet five years later (Romano 2015). The foundation played a central role in the 1980s by constituting an influential think tank that promoted reformist ideas against “the French left . . . still mostly entangled in the intellectual and political archaisms,” explained Rosanvallon (1999) in the newspaper *Le Monde*.

73. “A systematic effort has already been made with regard to economics and is beginning to bear fruit. At the initiative of Professors E. Malinvaud and S. Kolm, the institution has recently recruited economists either from the French public administration and in particular from the INSEE (C. Sautter, J. Mairesse), or from American universities (G. de Ménéil, R. Portes). These economists have different geographical specializations (Japan for C. Sautter, Western Europe for J. Mairesse and G. de Ménéil, the socialist economies for R. Portes), but share a common theoretical approach to their discipline” (Furet 1981: n.p.). Interestingly, Furet did not mention the economist Aujac, the only recent hire who was supposed to promote the dialogue with other social sciences. Furet preferred to emphasize the new orientation of economics at the EHESS. Document titled “Note de travail de Mr. Furet sur les lignes principales de développement de l’Ecole,” June 1978.

agenda—as when Furet mentioned the oil crisis of 1973 and the five-point drop in the growth rate in 1975, which called for economic expertise.

After his election, Furet entrusted de Ménéil with the “mission” of strengthening economics.<sup>74</sup> Elected at the same time, Mairesse also referred to “our mission” regarding the constitution of a group of economists at the EHESS. To the extent that the EHESS board “sought to revive economics without having any real knowledge of the field,” Furet offered economists great autonomy in creating their group.<sup>75</sup> De Ménéil explained that they needed to set up a “strategic axis in three poles”: to rely on the legacy of the economic historian Ernest Labrousse and his quantitative approach, to hire world-class economists, and to promote international dialogue.<sup>76</sup> With this strategy in mind, between 1976 and 1985, de Ménéil gathered a group of eight economists: de Ménéil himself, Mairesse, Richard Portes, Roger Guesnerie, Jean-Jacques Laffont, Alan Kirman, François Bourguignon, and Louis André Gérard-Varet. Group members had received similar training based on an engineering approach and supplemented with research trips in the United States. Other social scientists described the group as the “Americans” or “econometricians” (Bourguignon and Guesnerie 1996: 325–26).<sup>77</sup> Its nicknames illustrated general features, but they also indicated the inability of social scientists to grasp possible variations in the work of the new economists. Among the new economist appointees, Robert Boyer, elected in 1983, stood as an exception. Although he was trained as an engineer at the *École polytechnique*, Boyer was a founder of the *École de la régulation*, and he endorsed an interdisciplinary approach.

With the exception of Boyer, all economists recognized themselves in US orthodox economics, and this was central to their hiring. “Whether it was Furet or Le Goff,” Bourguignon explained, “they also had a fairly international vision of things. I think that the fact that we represented in France this economics that was valued abroad, internationally—much more than it was in France—played an absolutely considerable role.”<sup>78</sup>

74. Georges de Ménéil (economist, EHESS), interview with author, June 28, 2018.

75. Jacques Mairesse (economist, EHESS and ENSAE), interview with author, March 26, 2018.

76. De Ménéil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

77. François Bourguignon (economist, EHESS and PSE), interview with author, June 29, 2021.

78. François Bourguignon (economist, EHESS and PSE), interview with author, April 17, 2018.

When Furet looked beyond France, he looked in direction of the United States. Furet “profoundly admired the great American universities,” and during his tenure as the head of the EHESS, he regularly gave lectures at the University of Chicago and even became a professor in its history department and joined its Committee on Social Thought in 1985 (Baker 2000: 1). The new generation of economists shared this view: when they met in Canada in the mid-1970s before their election at the EHESS, Bourguignon and Laffont made an informal agreement to create an academic institution for economic research that resembled North American ones.<sup>79</sup> More specifically, the economists looked toward the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In an interview, de Ménil stated that he was in line with the engineering culture at MIT, where he had done his PhD, and argued that “the nature of economic research is scientific: we proceed with hypotheses that can be rejected thanks to data.”<sup>80</sup> Mairesse also noted that “I was lucky to go to MIT [as a visiting scholar] . . . because MIT was great, there was an engineering spirit.”<sup>81</sup>

The MIT engineering culture echoes the engineering background of the new generation of economists who were mainly trained in French engineering schools such as the *École polytechnique*, the *École des ponts et chaussées*, and ENSAE.<sup>82</sup> This new generation endorsed the main orientations of MIT economics, including the new-Keynesian approach, comparative analysis of economic systems, and policy-oriented research (Cherrier 2014). For instance, Mairesse (1978) estimated technical progress by using Solow’s production model.<sup>83</sup> Portes (with Winter [Portes and Winter 1977]) continued the comparative economics defended by Evsey Domar and Charles Kindleberger by comparing the supply of consumption goods in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland from the mid-1950s to 1975. De Ménil (with Nasse [de Ménil and Nasse 1977]) developed the “new Keynesian”-inspired model Metric. Finally, Bourguignon (1974) investigated a topic similar to one investigated by the

79. Bourguignon, interview with author, April 17, 2018.

80. De Ménil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

81. Mairesse, interview with author, March 26, 2018.

82. On the engineering approach in economics, see the *History of Political Economy* annual supplement titled *Economics and Engineering: Institutions, Practices, and Cultures*, edited by Duarte and Giraud (2020).

83. On the development of the new growth theory, see the *History of Political Economy* annual supplement titled *Robert Solow and the Development of Growth Economics*, edited by Boianovsky and Hoover (2009).

MIT economist Robert Merton (see Bourguignon 1974: 141n): both worked to introduce uncertainty within Solow's production model by using a stochastic process. As explained by Bourguignon, we "had models that we tried to test with econometric methods," but the real aim of their research was "trying to establish economic policies on a more solid basis."<sup>84</sup> Once again, this view was in line with that of economists at MIT who were engaged "in public debates while insisting on remaining experts devoid of political intentions" (Cherrier 2014: 39).

The new generation of economists at the EHESS had been involved with the French economic administration. Sautter and Mairesse worked at INSEE, the statistical agency of the French administration; de Ménil created the model Metric for the administration; and before shifting toward a theoretical approach, Guesnerie (with Malgrange [Guesnerie and Malgrange 1972]) participated in creating a planning model for the French economic administration.<sup>85</sup> After being appointed at the EHESS, they continued to participate in economic policymaking. In 1983, Portes founded the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) in London, with the aim of its becoming the European counterpart of the NBER and improving "the quality of policy decisions through providing policy-relevant research, based soundly in economic theory, to policymakers, the private sector and civil society."<sup>86</sup> Two years later, EHESS economists also launched the journal *Economic Policy*, a collaborative effort between the CEPR and the Fondation de la maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH)—the EHESS foundation. The aim of the journal, which still exists, was "to reach beyond an academic audience to those who make decisions in government and business and those who seek to influence them" ("Editors' Introduction" 1985).

While they took part in economic policymaking, EHESS economists also sought to transform French economics by greatly increasing international academic exchanges. To achieve this ambition, de Ménil and Mairesse created a new economics research center at the EHESS—the Centre d'économie quantitative et comparative (CEQC). They modeled the CEQC after the CORE research center at Leuven, Belgium, which

84. Bourguignon, interview with author, April 17, 2018.

85. Guesnerie explained his shift from empirical works to theoretical research by the lack of resources—such as research assistants—in France by comparing his situation with that of his American colleagues. Roger Guesnerie (economist, EHESS and Collège de France), interview with author, April 30, 2021.

86. As noted on the CEPR's website (<https://cepr.org/about>), accessed January 17, 2023.

“was one of the main channels through which economic modelling techniques arrived from the USA to the French-speaking world” and which Gérard-Varet, Guesnerie, Kirman, and Laffont had visited a number of times (Düppe 2017: 31–32).<sup>87</sup> According to Gérard Debreu, CORE was “the major research center in mathematical economics outside the United States” (quoted in Düppe 2017: 239). De Ménil explained that he chose the terms “quantitative” and “comparative” for naming the center, in order to emphasize the mathematical approach of economics and to encourage the international openness of the research.<sup>88</sup>

At the CEQC, de Ménil took charge of the day-to-day management and developed macroeconomics with a comparative approach; his first project was to compare the Metric forecasting model with another model created in Germany.<sup>89</sup> The research center served as the institutional base for strengthening international academic collaboration. For instance, when de Ménil’s friend Martin Feldstein—after becoming president of the NBER in 1977 with the plan to consolidate the dialogue between the United States and Europe—suggested that de Ménil establish an NBER seminar in France, de Ménil saw it as a great opportunity to set up a joint seminar between the NBER and the FMSH. Despite initial reservations, Feldstein eventually was persuaded by Portes and the Princeton economist William Branson. As a result, the International Seminar of Macroeconomics (ISoM) was created in 1978.<sup>90</sup> From that point on, it gathered economists from both sides of the Atlantic to discuss matters of macroeconomic theory.<sup>91</sup>

The emphasis on international standards—defined as the ability to publish in leading US academic journals—contrasted with the tradition of economic research at the Sixth Section and, more broadly, with the standards of French faculties. The figurehead of postwar French economics was François Perroux, a Collège de France professor and *directeur d’étude cumulant* at the EHESS.<sup>92</sup> To the new generation of economists, Perroux

87. The CORE itself was modeled after the Cowles Commission in the United States (Düppe 2017: 238–40).

88. Georges de Ménil (economist, EHESS), interview with author, February 10, 2021.

89. De Ménil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

90. De Ménil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

91. On ISoM and its impact on European economics, see Goutsmedt, Renault, and Sergi 2021.

92. Although he had been *directeur d’études* at the EHESS since 1955, Perroux was not deeply involved in the debates on the place of economics in the institution.



was the archetype of *passé* economics. As Guesnerie pointed out, “It was obvious to us and to all the people we recruited: we were in the networks connected to the American network. With a particular closeness to the Econometric Society, for example. There were several fellows from the Econometric Society. We were simply doing research that was being done in the world. We were not doing research designed to please François Perroux and his disciples.”<sup>93</sup> Like Guesnerie, Mairesse explained that at Perroux’s research center “we could do nothing. Nothing. It was a mess, his thing. . . . It was completely disorganized.”<sup>94</sup> In 1974, Kolm published an opinion piece in *Le Monde* titled “La renaissance de la science économique française” (“The Rebirth of French Economics”), in which Perroux was not mentioned among the “illustrious elders” of French economics. Kolm highlighted the success abroad of a new generation of French economists who endorsed the microeconomic approach to the study of macroeconomic facts—the methodological approach endorsed by Malinvaud, the figurehead of French engineering economics.<sup>95</sup> In addition, he severely criticized the French higher education system for granting professorial positions to those who wrote for “the big French newspapers” rather than those who published in “international journals of economics.” He called for replacing the traditional French approach with an economic methodology based on international standards: “The expression ‘French economics’ . . . is, in itself, silly. Science has no homeland. . . . It is the contribution of the French community to the world, international and stateless Economic Science.”

While the new generation of economists opposed the previous generation, they continued to emphasize that they were part of the EHESS tradition. Strategically, in order to give prominence to their methodological pluralism, economists did not hesitate to emphasize their occasional non-economic work, such as anthropology for de Ménil, geography and law for Kirman, history for Mairesse and Bourguignon. Given the EHESS tradition, the economists’ tactic was understandable, but, in practice, few concrete exchanges went on between economics and other social sciences within the school. Indeed, endorsing international standards and simultaneously maintaining a dialogue with other social scientists was just

93. Roger Guesnerie (economist, EHESS and Collège de France), interview with author, October 25, 2017.

94. Mairesse, interview with author, March 26, 2018.

95. On Malinvaud’s methodology, see Renault 2022.

impossible for economists, in part owing to the use of mathematical language. As Mairesse recalled, “My idea was that our mission . . . was to show that at the Ecole des hautes études, there were good economists who published, and from that point of view, it succeeded perfectly. But this was done somewhat at the expense of internal interactions, perhaps.”<sup>96</sup> With the exception of Mairesse, the new generation of economists—Bourguignon, de Ménil, and Kirman—all recognized that the economists had limited interactions with other social scientists.<sup>97</sup> However, they did not all have the same attitude toward other social sciences. For example, Bourguignon described Laffont as “someone who was very unyielding on these things. For him, it was only this formalized, modern economy that mattered. . . . I think he was too sectarian.”<sup>98</sup> Like Laffont, de Ménil considered the Braudelian project of bringing together all social sciences as a “great illusion” and believed that interdisciplinarity is a “very difficult exercise.”<sup>99</sup> In contrast, Bourguignon believed that economics was not a science, although he acknowledged its difference with other social sciences around the use of mathematical language.<sup>100</sup> In thesis committees, members of the new generation of economists seldom invited social scientists other than economists, while the former were invited by their colleagues from other disciplines (Godechot 2011).

The separation of economists from other social scientists meant that the economists had to coax the latter into accepting that new recruits would adopt a mathematical approach. De Ménil, for example, strategically invoked the legacy of the historian Ernest Labrousse and his quantitative approach in building the new generation of economists.<sup>101</sup> While some social scientists may have resisted “the econometricians” due to the social scientists’ rejection of modeling, citing Labrousse’s works allowed economists to present their approach as part of a tradition of quantitative economic history when the former was utterly distinct from the latter.<sup>102</sup>

While economists were conciliating other social scientists, they had a different attitude toward economists who took an approach that varied

96. Mairesse, interview with author, March 26, 2018.

97. This disjunction of economics from other social sciences has been a characteristic feature of American economics since the end of World War II (Fourcade, Ollion, and Algan 2015).

98. Bourguignon, interview with author, April 17, 2018.

99. De Ménil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

100. Bourguignon, interview with author, April 17, 2018.

101. De Ménil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

102. On Labrousse’s economic history, see Borghetti 2005.

from their own. They fiercely defended modeling. For example, when Attali lobbied for a position at the EHESS, Kolm vigorously opposed his election, even threatening that he would resign immediately if Attali were elected.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, Kolm vehemently opposed the recruitment of Alain Lipietz, a candidate supported by Bettelheim in 1981 and 1982.<sup>104</sup> His were not just pretty words: “It must be said that reading these texts [Lipietz’s], which unfold stupidity after stupidity, nonsense after verbiage, evidence after gratuitous assertion, contradiction after bluff, crass ignorance after primary incomprehension, provokes, when one has to do it, a strong uneasiness, a feeling of nausea.”<sup>105</sup> Kolm’s attack was also political. He attacked Lipietz’s Marxist approach, as confirmed by de Ménénil, who also opposed his recruitment: “I don’t know Lipietz’s work well. But, I trust the colleagues who say that it is a very rigorous and rigid Marxism. Very far from the actual scientific work. . . . [He] had no place in the economics department as it had been thought.”<sup>106</sup>

Boyer, the sole representative of the *École de la régulation* at the EHESS, was not actively opposed by his colleagues but was not fully supported, either.<sup>107</sup> In an interview, Boyer considered that he was elected “by accident, by clumsiness” because EHESS economists felt they could not reject a second economist who endorsed the regulation approach, after the rejection of Lipietz.<sup>108</sup> As a result, the *École de la régulation*, which drew its “vision of capitalism and their methodological tools from the work of the ‘realist-sociological’ current”—namely, the traditional approach of economics at the Sixth Section—was largely excluded from the EHESS (Pouch 2018: 173).

The election of the anthropologist Marc Augé as president of the EHESS in 1985 marked the end of a transformative period for economics. “He did not support us,” deplored Mairesse.<sup>109</sup> Faced with a less supportive administration, EHESS economists had to change strategy. Instead of improving their position within the institution, they forged alliances with

103. Mairesse, interview with author, March 26, 2018.

104. Alain Lipietz (economist, CEPREMAP), interview with author, April 26, 2021.

105. Note of Kolm about Lipietz, n.d., Fonds Marzocchi, Carton 155 EHE 8, Dossier Centre d’études des modes industrialisation—CEMI (C. Bettelheim), Archives EHESS.

106. De Ménénil, interview with author, June 28, 2018.

107. “He was not seen as the candidate of the economists. But there was no hostility or campaign against him [Boyer].” Guesnerie, interview with author, October 25, 2017.

108. Robert Boyer (economist, EHESS and CEPREMAP), interview with author, May 21, 2021.

109. Mairesse, interview with author, March 26, 2018.

other research centers in France and Europe (Bourguignon and Guesnerie 1996: 335–36). In 1988, at the instigation of Bourguignon, these efforts culminated with the merging of the CEQC and the Laboratoire d'économie politique (at the *École normale supérieure*) to create Delta. The same year, Guesnerie established a doctoral training program that was incorporated into the European Doctoral Programme in Quantitative Economics, which was launched by the CORE research center in Belgium, LSE in England, and the University of Bonn in Germany. After having successfully transformed their methods, EHESS economists could now disseminate their approach with the help of research and teaching institutions. By 2014, when the International Monetary Fund identified “economists under 45 [who] will have the most influence in the coming decades on our understanding of the global economy” (Rollins 2014: 20), EHESS economics had already made its mark in the profession. Among the twenty-five laureates, seven had studied at the EHESS.

#### 4. Conclusion

The history of economics at the EHESS provides an interesting illustration of the discipline's rise to authority in postwar social science. Originally, the interdisciplinary scientific agenda of the EHESS, combined with the empirical and interdisciplinary tradition of French economics, did not seem to offer the right environment for the emergence of a mathematical economics based on international standards. Yet, under the presidency of the historian Furet and despite serious opposition, the EHESS appointed a group of economists inspired by the work of MIT economists. Furet meant to accelerate the integration of French social sciences into the international research community and to increase the impact of the social sciences on major societal debates. That new environment facilitated the election of a new generation of model-oriented and internationally oriented economists who gradually supplanted the advocates of an approach based on sociological and empirical methods.

Retracing the chaotic and unexpected journey of economics at the EHESS sheds light on the transformation of French economics as a whole. In the 1970s, as French economists began to adopt international standards, there were significant pockets of resistance in French universities. Local circumstances made the shift from an interdisciplinary and pluralist approach to a mathematical approach different from one institution to another, which suggests that we need more case studies to form

a better idea of the overall picture of both the adoption and the resistance to this change.

It is well known that in the United States, the turn toward a more abstract and apolitical orientation made it easier for economists to present their discipline as detached from other social sciences and to be recognized as reliable experts in public policymaking (Bernstein 2004). In France, we know that the endorsement of new methods by economists took time, with the 1970s marking a turning point. Further research is needed, however, to determine to what extent the new methodological identity of economics led its practitioners to move away from other social sciences and to gain greater influence in policy circles.

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