



# Hidden Agency: Economists and Authoritarian Regimes in the 20th Century

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# **Hidden Agency: Economists and Authoritarian Regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction to Federico D'Onofrio and Gerardo Serra (eds.), *Symposium on Economists and Authoritarian Regimes in the 20th Century*.**

## **ABSTRACT**

This symposium analyses the mutually constitutive relationship between economic knowledge and political order. Through a wide range of case studies from Europe, Africa, and Latin America, the essays collected shed new light on the choices and constraints faced by economists under authoritarian rule in the twentieth century. The contribution of the symposium is twofold. Firstly, it expands the geographical and chronological scope of the conversation on the politics of economics. Secondly, it encourages a more nuanced understanding of economists' agency in their different guises as educators, party propagandists, policy-makers, model-builders and dissidents.

**KEYWORDS:** authoritarianism, dictatorship, 20<sup>th</sup> century, economists, agency, political economy

## **Introduction**

This symposium presents a collection of essays on economists' lives and work in the context of 20th century authoritarian regimes. The attempt to understand the relationship between forms of government and economic outcomes runs through the whole history of political

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the papers published in this volume have been presented at the workshop on 'Hidden Agencies: Economists and Political Economy under Authoritarian Rule' (University of Manchester, 8 December 2018), and at the annual conference of the History of Economics Society (Columbia University, NY, 20-23 June 2019). We would like to thank the generosity of the Research Network Fund of the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures of the University of Manchester for making the 2018 workshop possible. Thanks to the participants, referees and Francesca Billiani for providing helpful comments. All errors remain our responsibility.

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economy. In more recent decades, the respective outcomes of democratic and non-democratic governments have still been widely debated among economists and economic historians (Barro 1996, Rodrik and Wacziarg 2005, Acemoglu, Naidu, Restrepo, and Robinson 2019), who often adopted ludicrously *ad hoc* definitions of democracy (Olson 1993). Political scientist A. James Gregor, instead, has coined the term “developmental dictatorship” to underline the potential of certain dictatorial regimes to bring about “modernization” (Gregor 1980).

On the other hand, historians have stressed the intrinsically authoritarian nature of the purportedly neutral rule by the expert. While the connection between communist regimes and top-down economic planning is obvious, fascist regimes and movements of the early 20th century are often associated with “technocracy” (for instance, Salsano 1993, Cabo, Prieto, Pan-Montojo 2014; Mattei 2017b). Yet, the emphasis on ‘technocracy’ as an explanatory variable can obscure the variety of roles played by economists, and the contextual conditions of their action. As a consequence, a historical and sociological appraisal of the role played by economists in shaping the identity and the trajectory of dictatorships remains underdeveloped. Since authoritarian regimes have also been laboratories for economic and social transformation, and catalysts for the production of new iconographies and political practices, studying how economists worked is conducive to a fuller understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship between the economic and political orders.

Admittedly, our quest for economists’ agency under authoritarian rule faces daunting conceptual difficulties, pertaining to both the definition of these political forms, and how economists inhabited them. What is an authoritarian regime, anyway? Over the course of the 20th century, an important part of the attempt to answer this question has taken the form of a dichotomous distinction between “totalitarian” and “authoritarian” states (Arendt 1948, Linz 1964 and 2000, Friederich and Brzezinski 1965). More recently, political scientists and sociologists have coined new categories to differentiate between different types of authoritarianism (“neo-sultanistic, neo-patrimonial, personal, bureaucratic authoritarian, military, inclusive military, exclusive military, single party, dominant (or hegemonic) party, semi-authoritarian, autocratic, and totalitarian”, Haber 2006). Initially these concepts seemed promising for our inquiry, but imposing them on our case studies would have led to sacrifice some of their complexity and nuance. We decided therefore to loosen our conceptual starting point, and focus on historical contexts that, in spite of profound differences, shared some broad features such as the lack of a competitive political system, strong limitations to the press and teaching freedom, and a highly developed repressive apparatus.

These features deeply affected the ways in which economists expressed themselves, and their ability to influence policies. The broadening debate on the public role of economists and economics (Mata and Medema 2013, eds.; Maas, Guidi and Medema 2019), benefitting from a more explicit inclusion of heuristic tools drawn from media studies and the sociology of knowledge, remains focused on parliamentary contexts. It follows that much remains to be done to identify and historicise the specificities of the economists' positions within the restricted and contested "public sphere" of authoritarian regimes.

### **Geographies of authoritarianism**

This symposium presents case studies from Portugal (José Luís Cardoso), Russia (Till Düppe and Sarah Joly-Simard), Colombia (Elisa Grandi), Brazil (Alexandre Andrada and Mauro Boianovsky), Zimbabwe (Tinashe Nyamunda), Albania (Doriana Matraku Dervishi and Marianne Johnson), and France (Nicolas Brisset and Raphaël Fèvre). The current historiography, while substantial, has tended to focus on a limited sample of European countries and one outlier, Chile. The Cold War made an understanding of the political implications of Soviet economic debates particularly urgent. From this point of view, an appraisal of the 1920s debates on industrialisation, or of the rise of mathematical economics, contributed to shape the fields of Soviet studies and history (Lewin 1975, Ellman 1973). In the 1990s, in parallel with retrospective discussions of Soviet economic thought and policy (Sutela 1991), acknowledging the wide variety of theoretical constellations in other Eastern European countries became intertwined with the debate on post-communist transitions (Wagener 1998). Alternatively, as shown by Peter Caldwell (2003) in his penetrating study of the German Democratic Republic, the history of Marxist political economy could be inscribed, alongside that of legal theory, philosophy and cybernetics, into a holistic analysis of the relationship between the production of knowledge in the human and social sciences, planning and state power. Ethnographic approaches to socialist planning have proven to be particularly fruitful in reconstructing the complex political lives of economic concepts and practices (Lampland 1996, Cucu 2019). Nor has the history of economics under communist rule simply been invoked to shed light on its context of inception: Vincent Barnett (2006), for example, mobilised Soviet economics to advocate for a more contextual and historically nuanced understanding of what counts as "dissent". The last few years have seen the proliferation of initiatives that have vastly enriched our understanding of the history of economics under communism. Occasionally, this has also led to include the lives and careers of historians of economic thought under Soviet rule (Shirokorad and Zweynert 2012; Boldyrev and Kragh 2015). The "Between Bukharin and

Balcerowicz: A Comparative History of Economic Thought under Communism” project is producing new national histories of economics under communist rule (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, China, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, USSR, Yugoslavia). More recently, an annual supplement to *History of Political Economy*, entirely dedicated to the history of economic knowledge under socialism (Düppe and Boldyrev 2019), signals the increasing willingness of our field to take the ideas of economists working under dictatorship (or at least their histories) seriously.

Within the broad historiography on fascisms, especially following Zeev Sternhell’s (1983) interpretation of fascist ideology as rooted in a revisionist socialism, Italian corporativism has provided a crucial case study. For historians of economic thought, it is only since the 1980s, when the history of Fascist economic thought started attracting some sustained attention, that the emphasis has shifted from “rational reconstructions” to a “more detached historical analysis” (Guidi 2000). Over the past few years, different generations of Italian scholars have come together to discuss these issues as part of their shared commitment to illuminate a divisive period in the country’s history (for example Barucci, Bini, and Conigliello, eds. 2017, and the project led by Massimo Augello at the Centro Interuniversitario di Documentazione sul Pensiero Economico Italiano). But while, in spite of substantial methodological differences, the literature on Eastern Europe shares an emphasis on the power of the political context to transform deeply the way economists think and work, the Italian case is more ambivalent. Indeed, the literature seems to be divided between a strand focusing on the central role of economists in conceptualising a new “corporative system” as a “third way” between liberalism and socialism, and one which instead privileges continuity and underlines the opportunistic behaviour of liberal economists. Yet, the thematic emphasis and approaches deployed have varied immensely, and the latest studies on Italian economists under fascism have adopted new frameworks. This has been done, for example, by reading the work of fascist economists as part of an international discourse in support of austerity (Mattei 2017a), through an exploration of agricultural economists’ contribution to policy-making (D’Onofrio 2017), or by uncovering new political implications in the empirical debates on the measurement of income inequality (Gabbuti forthcoming).

Other varieties of corporatist and fascist economics have been surveyed, with particular reference to the French case (Baker 2006) and the Portuguese Estado Novo (1932-1974). Like in the Italian case, discussions of Portugal under Salazar have emphasised the ambivalence of the national economists’ position, torn between the articulation of a radically new ‘corporative

order', and the preservation of older "liberal" ideas and categories (Bastien and Cardoso 2007). The long-lasting rule of the Estado Novo connects the experiences of interwar fascism with the right-wing regimes of the post-war period. Outside Europe, historians of economics have concentrated on Pinochet's Chile (1973-1990) and emphasised the profound impact of foreign economists on domestic politics and economic policies. While the pioneer study of Juan Gabriel Valdés (1995) documented the variety of ways in which Chicago economists reshaped the Chilean state and its national economy, recent publications have either focused on the narrower - but highly controversial - issue of Hayek's support for Pinochet's regime (Caldwell and Montes 2015), or shed light on alternative transnational networks, such as those inspired by Yugoslav decentralised socialism, that articulated a critique of the "Chicago Boys" (Bockman 2019).

As suggested by studies on China (Weber forthcoming), Indonesia (Simpson 2008) and Ghana (Serra 2015) – among others - the case studies discussed above do not exhaust the geographical horizon of the literature on economics under authoritarian rule. From this point of view, the choice to go beyond the authoritarian-totalitarian distinction allows us to stretch the time-span covered (from the interwar period to the 1980s) and, more importantly, establish a conversation between "classic" examples (Stalin's Russia, the Estado Novo in Portugal, Vichy's France), and political formations that have either been completely ignored by historians of economists (Albania under Enver Hoxha, Southern Rhodesia at the time of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence), or not discussed through this lens (Brazil under Emílio Garrastazu Médici and Ernesto Geisel, Colombia under Gustavo Rojas-Pinilla). The inclusion of Southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe) is not simply a contribution to the largely neglected history of economics in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nyamunda's analysis points at the continuous centrality of economists in establishing an oppressive political formation, as it evolved from territory ruled by a chartered company to postcolonial nation. Even though it was characterised by a distinctive racialist outlook and ideology, the historical trajectory of Southern Rhodesia raises questions on the analogies and differences between the ways in which authoritarianism works in colonial dependencies and sovereign states.

## **Uncovering agency**

### *Actors*

The biographical lens through which much history of economics under dictatorship has been written privileges a narrative that almost inevitably ends with the “fall from grace”. The fate of many system-builders who went, sometimes abruptly, from being hailed as the architects of the new order to enemies of the state, is a powerful reminder of the intellectual and political uncertainties of life under authoritarian rule. The trajectory of Nikolai Bukharin remains paradigmatic (Cohen 1980). But there are many other, less known (and sometimes less tragic), histories. Jenő Varga, a key economic advisor to Stalin’s regime, was discredited for his position on foreign policy (which contradicted Stalin’s), but his life was spared and he managed to maintain an academic position (Mommen 2011). Omar Ottonelli (2012; 2013) has vividly reconstructed the tragic irony of the life of the Jewish (and later Catholic) economist Gino Arias who, after contributing to the theorisation of Italian corporatism, fled to Argentina to avoid being prosecuted under the racial laws. He did not live long enough to know that his request to be readmitted into Italian academia had been accepted by Mussolini himself. The list could go on.

These life-trajectories show how difficult it is to encapsulate the work of economists under authoritarian regimes in clear-cut categories: regime’s ideologues or victims of power. Following Nikolai Kremenstov’s (1997) pathbreaking study of Stalinist science, we do not think of economists as the mere victims of the repressive power of the state. Nor do we, by adopting James C. Scott’s notion of “hidden transcript” (1990), reduce economists’ agency to an opaque, everyday resistance against an overwhelming power. Resistance was not the only, or even the dominant form of agency. Rather, economists behaved like other citizens of non-democratic states. It holds for many of them what the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak observed, paraphrasing Patrick Seriot, about Soviet citizens: “by the end of perestroika in the late 1980s, it had become politically important, especially for members of the intelligentsia, to emphasize that during socialism there was no “mixing [of] the language of power with their own language” and that their own language was “a free space to be extended through struggle” (Seriot 1992, 205–6). But this story of divided languages was, to a large extent, a retrospective late- and post-perestroika construction.” (Yurchak 2005). For many economists, the dichotomous distinction between the “economics of the regime” and their own was an *a posteriori* reconstruction.

Who was then shaping the ordinary intellectual life of economists? Ronald L. Meek wrote that, following “great changes in economic and social institutions [...] it happens that the political leaders who usher in the changes are themselves men with a taste for theoretical generalisation,

in which case both the new order and the theory of the new order may come to be constructed under the guidance of one and the same hand” (Meek 1953-54, 232).

The two contributions that open the symposium, devoted respectively to the Estado Novo in Portugal and to Stalin’s Russia, show that this was indeed the case, but also suggest great diversity. This diversity can be appreciated by looking at two main aspects. The first consists in studying the dictator as an economic thinker in his own right. This line of inquiry has informed discussions of political contexts as different as Nazi Germany (Birken 1991) and socialist Cuba (Yaffe 2009). In this volume, Cardoso presents a reconstruction of the intellectual contributions of António de Oliveira Salazar. Before becoming President of the Council (Prime Minister) in 1932, Salazar taught Political Economy and Public Finance in the Faculty of Law at the University of Coimbra. His writings from this period (1916-1928) dealt primarily with agriculture and monetary theory and policy, and displayed a systematic knowledge of classical, institutionalist, Marxist and neoclassical approaches to political economy. Combining an institutionalist sensitivity with an advocacy of stable exchange rates, Salazar was more concerned with improving Portugal’s financial and commercial position than with the elaboration of economic theory. More importantly, Cardoso shows the significant degree of disconnect and contradiction between Salazar’s academic writings, and his ideas and policies as the ruler of a “corporative” state.

The second way of analysing the impact of a dictator on economic discourse is by exploring their interventions on the institutional and rhetorical landscape within which economic debates occur. This is the key theme in Düppe’s and Joly-Simard’s discussion of Stalin. Even though he wrote about issues as disparate as metaphysics, philosophy of science and linguistics, his contribution to political economy rests primarily with *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (Stalin 1952), and with the quest for a new textbook on the political economy of socialism. The necessity for the textbook arose from the declaration, in 1936, that socialism had been achieved in the USSR. What was needed, then, was an authoritative text that could update the wisdom of the three “founding fathers” (Marx, Engels, Lenin) in light of the unique position of Soviet Russia, and that could provide the scientific basis to guide the country’s transition to full communism. The creation of the textbook kept occupied the top-ranks of the Soviet economics profession for almost twenty years. It was only in 1954, after Stalin’s death in 1953, that the textbook was finally published. The authors reach the fascinating (and seemingly counterintuitive) conclusion that Stalin’s insistence on opening up the debate about the political economy of socialism was part of a strategy aimed at consolidating his rule.

Specifically, Düppe and Joly-Simard show that, by erecting a facade of scientific pluralism, Stalin managed to divert the intellectuals' attention from economic mismanagement and political repression, consolidate his persona as the "philosopher king", and create a rhetorical and institutional context in which his opponents could be easily dismissed and removed. Behind the scene of the carefully staged representations, repression appears so strict that the scientific debate turns into a monologue (in Bakhtin's sense, Bakhtin 1990) and the dictator the only audible voice left.

The breadth of the economic debate then depended on a number of contingencies, such as the topics addressed. Stalin himself, though, insisted on the distinction between the political economy of socialism and economic policy (Düppe and Joly-Simard, this issue). Clearly, he intended to shape the debate on the former. But technical aspects of economic policy, such as public finance, agricultural economics, exchange rates and foreign trade related topics offered economists some space for free discussions - although the bourgeois experts involved in the first five-years plan learnt the limits of this freedom the hardest way (Klein 1999). Applied technical issues, therefore, remained a main justification for the production of economic knowledge – and could represent a potential survival strategy- under the harshest regimes, as Matraku Dervishi and Johnson show in their study of Hoxha's Albania. In light of applied economics' perceived ideological neutrality, methods and practices with an immediate practical content could be introduced more easily from abroad, as in Grandi's discussion of World Bank experts in Colombia.

#### *In and out*

The contributions represent a wide continuum, spanning from the extreme isolation of Albania to the relative openness (as far as the economists' international connections were concerned) of Brazil and Colombia. They force us to interrogate the dynamics underpinning the circulation and transfer of economic theories, models, individuals and institutions. In the postwar world, even economists living under authoritarian rule had to position themselves with respect to new hegemonic international trends, and respond to the growing internationalization, homogenization and "Americanization" of economics (Hesse 2012, Rossier and Bühlmann 2018). Admittedly, the literature on Pinochet's Chile has already provided a powerful reminder of the importance of studying economic ideas under dictatorship as part of a broader international system. But the dominant narrative is still that of a one-way flow from the "centre" to the "periphery", and is the story of a group of foreign economists who, sharing a commitment

to free-markets, reinforced the intellectual, political and economic infrastructure of the regime. The case studies collected here open up a wider range of possibilities to reflect on the sometimes porous intellectual boundaries of authoritarian regimes.

In Hoxha's Albania, the Soviet political economy "imported" in the 1950s became a cage that prevented any significant theoretical innovation. In Portugal, in the last years of the Estado Novo's rule, "foreign" economic theories and categories provided sceptics of the regime with room for manoeuvre. The local economists' participation in international networks – those of the Marshall Plan, in the Portuguese case – is therefore not to be seen exclusively in terms of the acquisition of new methods, but also through its effect on economists' agency. Salazar's rule (Cardoso, this volume) provides an example of how "imported" Keynesianism acquired a political life of its own, and evolved from dissent to mainstream.

The cases of Brazil (Andrada and Boianovsky, this volume) and Colombia (Grandi, this volume) introduce additional layers. Elisa Grandi's exploration of 1950s Colombia provides an instance in which the foreign "international" economists provided arguments for the regime's policies. The apparent neutrality of economics made it easy for World Bank experts to continue working in Colombia regardless of the nature of government in power. But the role of foreign consultants became increasingly problematic, as the elites of the Cauca Valley dragged them into their fight against the central government. In this chapter of the global history of the New Deal (Patel 2016), TVA's former head David Lilienthal became involved in the struggle between local notables and the dictator. Alexandre Andrada's and Mauro Boianovsky's discuss the income distribution controversy in 1970s Brazil. The authors convincingly demonstrate how the military government tried to strike a balance between the necessities of political repression and a façade of academic freedom. This balance was upset by the intervention of external actors (such as American economists and international organisations) in the debate on inequality. Pro-government economists and officials decided to scientifically engage with criticism from outside, rather than disqualify it as foreign interference. Andrada's and Boianovsky's contribution also shows the fruitfulness of overcoming the boundaries separating intellectual history and political economy, and the necessity to historicize the co-construction of economic theory, statistical evidence, and political debates.

The case of Southern Rhodesia (Nyamunda, this volume) presents a more polarised relationship between national economists and foreign consultants. Nyamunda shows how and why, even

though Southern Rhodesia had its own community of academic economists, the government chose to employ the South African J.D. Sadie to identify viable policy options that did not challenge the racialist basis of the regime's ideology. Sadie's consultancy came at a difficult time, when the white settlers' minority ruling over Southern Rhodesia unilaterally declared their independence from Britain. This represented an act of opposition to the wave of decolonisation that was sweeping across the African continent. The Rhodesian government repressed and deported those radical academics who, like Giovanni Arrighi, employed the tools of historical analysis and dependency theory to challenge "mainstream" economists' complicity with racism and white settler rule.

### *New science, new sites*

In order to reconstruct the context in which economists worked, it is necessary to go beyond the role of the political leader and the interplay of national and international factors. In our selection of case studies, we tried to showcase the wide diversity of "sites" in which economists worked. It was not uncommon for authoritarian regimes to hold the view that a "new" science (or at least a science whose identity and expected contribution had been transformed by the regime's expectations) required the creation of new sites of teaching, research and data collection. This belief often resulted in a radical alteration of the institutional landscape, or in a heavy-handed intervention on existing structures. Within the extensive literature on the sites and institutional infrastructures of economic knowledge, socialist countries have been studied with particular attention. Relevant examples include the Conjuncture Institute of the People's Commissariat of Finance in 1920s Moscow (Barnett 1998; 2011), the post-stalinist Soviet Union computing infrastructure (Leeds 2016), the Humboldt University in the German Democratic Republic (Düppe 2017), or the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute in 1960s Ghana (Serra and Gerits 2019).

Some of the articles featured in this special issue address the "situatedness" of economic debates by expanding the analysis to non-socialist and non-democratic countries. In Cardoso's analysis of Portugal under Salazar (1932-1968) and Marcelo Caetano (1968-1974), institutions are fundamental in several respects. In the 1930s the Faculties of Law of the Universities of Coimbra and Lisbon, where Salazar and Caetano had respectively taught, became crucial sites for the construction of the regime's new corporative ideology, and incubators of the country's ruling elites. In the aftermath of World War II, the prominence acquired by the Institute of Economic and Financial Sciences of the Technical University of Lisbon (ISCEF, founded in

1931) marked simultaneously a turning point in the professionalisation of economics (with “qualitative” political economy being replaced by quantitative and mathematical approaches), and a shift in the boundaries of what was considered politically acceptable. By creating an institutional space for the circulation of Keynesian theory and categories, the ISCEF favoured “the emergence of authorized voices of dissent” (Cardoso, this volume).

The connection between regimes and centres of knowledge production is also underlined in Andrada’s and Boianovsky’s chapter on Brazil, and in Brisset and Fèvre’s analysis of François Perroux in Vichy’s France. In the Brazilian case, this can be observed with reference to the new Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA). In spite of having been established by the government, the IPEA guaranteed a significant degree of freedom on the politically explosive debate on income distribution. However, what contributed to shield several Brazilian economists associated with the IPEA from censorship (and possibly imprisonment), was their connections with foreign institutions, and specifically their PhDs from prestigious American universities. In the revealing words of the Yale-trained Edmar Bacha, ‘My PhD protected me’ (Andrada and Boianovsky, this volume). Perroux, on the other hand, was extremely active in the creation of new journals, book series and interdisciplinary institutions that mirrored his commitment to a more “holistic” economic science.

#### *Between ritual and entrepreneurship*

The articles highlight another variable: a growing degree of normalization of the regime and ritualization of its science. In practice, this ranged from the work of economists involved in the elaboration of a new ideology to those who, instead, contributed to the ritualized ossification of the regime’s outlook and beliefs. In the latter case, such as in Albania in the 1970s and 1980s, the regime was “normal life”, as for the late-Soviet citizens investigated by Yurchak (2005). The cases of Salazar in Portugal, Brazil and Vichy belong, instead, to the former category. Theoretical debate seems entirely stifled in the case of Albania presented by Matraku Dervishi and Johnson. The citation practices of doctoral dissertations discussed at the University of Tirana, and the narrowness of the topics allowed in academic economics, suggest that economics largely amounted to social rituals that echoed and disseminated state ideology. Albanian confirmation rituals differed from the strategic lip service paid by Italian economists of different persuasions to corporatism, which hid instead the attempt to advance very different agendas (Cavaliere 1999, 11). Strategic lip service masks the “real” meaning of texts through a formal homage to conventions. It is not necessarily an act of rebellion or defiance. It is rather

part of a strategy for exerting influence, although it belongs to the “tricks” of “writing between the lines” (Strauss 1941). The value of confirmation rituals, instead, resides in repetition, not in content; they are the academic equivalent of Durkheimian rituals that reinforce the group cohesion. They belong to the kind of ritualized acts and speech acts that precede the division ‘between mask (acting as if) and reality, truth and lie’ (Yurchak 2005). Deprived of any real creative debate, Albanian economic theory became - as Matraku Dervishi and Johnson observe - “functionally irrelevant for policy and practice” and turned into a political activity, an echo-chamber that cancelled every external noise. The task of economists became a mix of propaganda and ideological training. The case of L. D. Yaroshenko, who participated to the debate encouraged by Stalin described by Düppe and Joly-Simard, is an interesting demonstration of the ritual nature of certain events. By overestimating the openness of the 1952 debate, Yaroshenko exposed himself to the repressive force of the state, thus confirming the purely ritual nature of the debate.

On the opposite pole of the continuum, and in stark contrast with the ossified intellectual and institutional experience of Albania, we can locate the trajectory of François Perroux in Vichy’s France. On the basis of rich archival evidence, Nicolas Brisset and Raphaël Fèvre document the ways in which Perroux strategically mobilised the narrowing scope for political debate to develop and disseminate his ideas. Specifically, they argue that the authoritarian context provided an “opportunity” for the development of what they label Perroux’s “institutional and intellectual entrepreneurship”. The former refers to Perroux’s activities within the *Fondation française pour l’étude des problèmes humains* (or Carrel Foundation), set up by Marshal Pétain. Six months after joining as technical advisor, Perroux was already General Secretary. His creation of a new *Centre d’échanges de théorie économique* (CETE) within the Carrel Foundation proved to be crucial for the construction of new a “science of man” that reconfigured the relationship between biology, economics and other social sciences. Perroux’s life and work in the aftermath of France’s liberation suggest some further implications. In spite of his vocal support for Petain’s regime, Perroux survived, and reinvented himself as an authoritative and critical voice in the postwar era. His friend and co-author Yves Urvoy was not so lucky, and was shot by members of the Resistance for being a Vichy propagandist a few days before the liberation of Paris. These outcomes point at the unpredictability of the context in which many of the economists discussed in this volume lived and worked. It is important to historicise uncertainty rather than overemphasise the “rationality” of the strategies deployed by economists for mere survival, advancement of their scientific agenda, or career

improvement. On the other hand, the contribution on Perroux is the only one in this symposium discussing explicitly adaptation and “rebranding” in the aftermath of the regime’s fall. Perroux’s intellectual entrepreneurship led him to alter some of the terminology and conceptual apparatus of his Vichy writings, and to associate himself with political and intellectual networks that could facilitate a sympathetic and charitable interpretation of his involvement in Vichy’s regime. This is a reminder of the fact that economists who vocally supported authoritarian regimes could outlive them: in those cases, we can uncover their agency also in attempts to shape public memory and re-write history.

## **Conclusion**

This symposium hopes to enrich the debate on how economists lived and worked under authoritarian rule. By broadening the geographical horizon, stretching the time-span, and expanding the sites of analysis, these papers open up new vistas onto the political lives of economic knowledge in “the age of extremes” (Hobsbawm 1995). Rather than treating economists as either passive victims or uncritical ideologues, we showcase a great variety of ways in which economists inhabited and shaped repressive political contexts. From a historiographical point of view, the articles suggest the necessity of prudence and modesty when thinking about the relationship between economists and the authoritarian states under which they lived. In spite of crucial differences, economists appear active but not necessarily in charge. They are part of a system, and they play with its rules, but they are not ruthlessly determining its outcomes based on blind ideology, as sometimes literatures on experts and policy-making – often pointing its finger accusingly at “neoliberal” economists – seems to imply (Angner 2006, Clark 2016, among many others). Instead, it is possible to read the case studies in this volume by looking at the interaction of three main variables: the rank and position of the economists within the political and economic structure of the regime; the degree of openness of the nation’s economic community to international influences; and the degree of ritualization of economic discussions. While still elusive, the degree of freedom enjoyed by economists - and their agency - in a given political context can be glimpsed at the intersection of these three elements.

From today’s viewpoint, these case studies might look like postcards from a world that has been made irrelevant by the fall of the regimes discussed and by the end of the Cold War. Yet, in light of the profound differences (and some unsettling similarities) between the authoritarian political formations analysed here and those that populate the contemporary political

landscape, they are timely. The main value of these contributions does not lie in the possibility to uncover “valid” economic ideas that did not necessarily survive their context of inception. Instead, our ultimate hope is that this symposium will serve as an invitation to critically interrogate the “regimes of truth” within which economics and power structures coexist and shape each other.

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