

## MAURICE HALBWACHS AND CHICAGO SOCIOLOGISTS

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Christian TOPALOV

## Maurice Halbwachs and Chicago Sociologists

### ABSTRACT

This article examines how Maurice Halbwachs circulated among academic networks in Chicago during his Fall 1930 visiting professorship; specifically, his interactions with sociologists. It is based on scholarly studies he wrote on his return, family correspondence, and Halbwachs' "Lettres des États-Unis", published anonymously in a daily newspaper, the *Progrès de Lyon*. The Durkheimian sociologist was invited to Chicago by the sociologist William F. Ogburn in an attempt to promote quantitative research in the department, which at the time was sharply divided between "case studiers" and "statisticians". The year 1930 was precisely the moment the second group won out against the first, in a complete reorientation of Rockefeller Foundation and University of Chicago policy. Halbwachs did not have great esteem for the work being done by Park, Burgess and their students; their "concrete" and "picturesque" studies were not scientific to his mind, resembling instead the observations of explorers and missionaries, i.e., the raw material that real scholars and researchers—ethnologists and sociologists working in university offices—could then analyze. Halbwachs never thought to question this division of labor.

Maurice Halbwachs has been very favorably viewed in France in recent times. Not for his Durkheimianism, since, on the contrary, most recent French readings of his work tend to distance him from the theoretical rigidity and holism his master is currently criticized for. These intellectual initiatives have given rise to a new set of Halbwachsés. In the late 1970s, for example, in scientific contexts where the concern was to redefine urban sociology from an anthropological or interactionist perspective, Halbwachs became the sociologist who had brought the Chicago School (of sociology) to France (Grafmeyer and Joseph, 1979). Approximately ten years later, a second Halbwachs appeared, the student of collective memory; this was the result of action by historians trying to overcome what they saw as the petering out of economic and social history (Valensi, 1992; Lepetit, [1993] 1999). Once this approach had been launched, other Halbwachsés, dormant or hitherto unperceived, were awakened and added to these two. Walter Gierl, who is keeping a count of all publications mentioning Halbwachs, shows the curve taking off in the mid-1980s.<sup>(1)</sup> My own studies have obviously contributed to this inflation.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) Publications in English, French and German. See graph by M. Jaisson in *La lettre du LASMAS* (Sept. 2001, p. 27).

(2) For a genuine study in the history of

science that stands out from this mass of literature, see Jean-Michel Chapoulie (2001). Interestingly, Chapoulie rejects the very notion of a Chicago School.

Here I will debate an approach to Halbwachs expressed in the following statement by the geographer Marcel Roncayolo: “The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs [...] introduce[d] the Chicago School to France” (1994, p. 13). Halbwachs was invited to teach in the sociology department of the University of Chicago for the Fall quarter 1930 (three months), and in an article he published in January 1932 in the *Annales d’Histoire Économique et Sociale*, he mentioned a “small, original school of sociology” (p. 17). But are this event and this document enough to found Roncayolo’s claim? This article examines how Halbwachs received the work of the Chicago sociologists and proposes an interpretation of his reception based on micro-sociological description of the cultural contact between him and them.

That contact was first interpreted in the United States in 1960. In the preface to their English translation of Halbwachs’ brief textbook, *La morphologie sociale*, Otis D. Duncan and Harold W. Pfautz mention the *Annales* article, presenting it as the “the first published evidence of significant contact between American ‘human ecology’ and French *morphologie sociale*” (Duncan and Pfautz, 1960, p. 19). The authors underline the “close affinity between the two traditions and their significance for the modern developments in sociology” (p. 7),<sup>(3)</sup> crediting Halbwachs, together with Charles Booth, with “independent[ly] discover[ing] regularities in urban distribution and expansion, leading directly to the ecological formulations of Park and his students” (p. 22). Halbwachs’ 1909 doctoral thesis on expropriations and the price of building sites in Paris is understood to have made him a precursor of Chicago School human ecology: “It is hardly stretching interpretation to discern here a clear anticipation of the ‘zonal’, ‘sector’, and ‘multiple nuclei’ hypotheses of city growth that were to be popularized in American urban sociology and geography.” But Duncan and Pfautz did not stop there. Both were actively committed to the project headed by Morris Janowitz throughout the 1960s, which consisted of a retrospective construction of the Chicago School (Topalov, 2004). In 1964 Duncan resuscitated Ogburn, another Chicago sociologist discussed further on in this text, and in 1967 Pfautz annexed Booth. Urban studies were expanding in the United States at the time, and partisans of Chicago-style human ecology had undertaken to find roots and additional legitimation in Europe for the history they sought to tell.<sup>(4)</sup>

In 1979 the French sociologists Yves Grafmeyer and Isaac Joseph likewise annexed Halbwachs to human ecology –dubbed “urban ecology” for the occasion. But here the claim was of an entirely different order, indeed the very opposite. The point was not to find European ancestors for human ecology studies –the field was now focusing on increasingly vast spatial scales and its

(3) A few years earlier, L. F. Schnore (1958, p. 620) had discovered “striking parallels” between Durkheim’s “morphological” thinking” and the later development of human ecology.

(4) The “European ancestors” card was important in the competitive game going on

among North American sociology schools of the moment: Parsons was annexing Weber and Durkheim at Harvard, while at Columbia, Lazarsfeld was assembling evidence of the European history of “empirical sociology”.

models were becoming increasingly formalized— but rather to find American ancestors for the kind of fieldwork and comprehensive sociology that Joseph and Grafmeyer sought to promote. For this purpose they published a set of texts –including Halbwachs’ article– that present a vision of the Chicago School ready for use by French sociologists. Their only commentary on this decision of theirs is the following: “Alongside the cartographies and abstract schemata of urban configurations, there now appeared in the Chicago School another dimension of ecology, explicitly in line with Durkheim’s morphological analysis and purporting to attend to society’s various ‘material forms’ –to use an expression dear to Maurice Halbwachs, one of the first French readers of Park and Burgess.” (Grafmeyer and Joseph, *ibid.*, p. 35). The idea that Halbwachs had introduced the Chicago School to France later came to be widely shared.

### Reception: a sociological problem

From the French perspective, however, this was a highly peculiar kind of reception. Halbwachs had no doubt observed that there was “an original school of sociology” to be found in Chicago. This expression is one of the few occurrences in which the activity of Park, Burgess and their students is associated by contemporaries to the notion of a “school”. In fact the term “Chicago school of sociology” appeared only retrospectively, in the late 1940s, when Park had died and the members of the so-called school had already separated or otherwise moved on (Harvey, 1987; Abbott, 1999, ch. 2). This suggests that Halbwachs may have used the expression by analogy with the term “sociological school” that Durkheim and his disciples had used to designate themselves when *L’Année Sociologique* group was first constituted. Regardless of the semantics, two points are worth noting.

First, Halbwachs was openly condescending in his judgment of studies done by the Park and Burgess group, deeming them “descriptive works rather than scientific ones” (1932, p. 18). He never alluded to those books again, either in his studies and lectures on cities (1934, 1939, 1942) or later reviews of North American publications (1931a, 1933, 1935, 1936). As for other French sociologists, they remained unaware of these new references for nearly 20 years. The North American situation itself provides at least a partial explanation for this silence: in 1930, the golden age of urban studies by University of Chicago sociologists was drawing to a close, and in their home country their work would soon be forgotten. One clear indication of this, of the many available, is the chapter on American sociology written by the Francophile sociologist Robert E. Lee Faris for George Gurvitch’s comprehensive survey of the discipline, published in New York in 1945. Though himself a former University of Chicago student and son of the department chairman at the time of Halbwachs’ visit, Faris made no mention of any Chicago School, insisting on the contrary that the 1920s marked the beginning of a decline in sociological “schools of thought”, which “do not survive

well in this stage of development”: “This urban ecology is not a school of thought [...] but rather a field of particular interest, which is interconnected in various ways with the rest of the sociological field” (Faris, 1945, p. 546, p. 553).<sup>(5)</sup> The first text of the supposed school to be translated into French was an article by Louis Wirth on human ecology, published by Gurvitch’s journal in 1947, the year Wirth was president of the American Sociological Association –a fact which probably had something to do with publication of the article. Pursuing this story would take us too far afield. It should simply be noted that French reception of Chicago sociologists was slow, fragmented and not generally associated with the notion of “school” until Joseph and Grafmeyer brought to France the “fact” that Janowitz had been busy solidifying over the preceding decade.

My method here for studying the cultural contact between Halbwachs and the Chicago sociologists is not so much a textual study as an ethnography of a scholar’s practices. Halbwachs’ 1932 article on Chicago surely contains precious indications of his view of the research being done in the University of Chicago sociology department. But above and beyond this document, I propose to observe in detail the situation Halbwachs found himself in in Chicago, his individual interactions with his university colleagues, and how he read and understood their writings.

This is made possible by an exceptional mine of sources: scholarly texts, a travel account, and correspondence. To begin with, we have the two scholarly articles Halbwachs published on his return to France: “Les budgets de familles ouvrières aux États-Unis”, published in June 1931 in the *Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France*, an administration whose work Halbwachs followed closely and which had previously published his research on French wage workers’ family budgets (Halbwachs, 1914);<sup>(6)</sup> and “Chicago, expérience ethnique”, published in January 1932 in the *Annales d’Histoire Économique et Sociale*, the journal of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch –Halbwachs had been on the journal’s editorial committee since its founding in 1929. The second set of sources consists of eight articles published by Halbwachs in the *Progrès*, a republican daily newspaper, from October 20, 1930 to February 20, 1931, under the general heading “Lettres des États-Unis” and signed “MH”.<sup>(7)</sup> This anonymous chronicle was a sort of narrative of travels in America, a genre that the press was eager to publish and which many French scholars practiced in the interwar period. Lastly, we have access to Halbwachs’ correspondence with his family throughout his stay, primarily a set of nineteen letters to his wife Yvonne back in Strasbourg.<sup>(8)</sup> Most of the

(5) This did not prevent Faris from publishing a history of the Chicago School twenty years later, in Janowitz’s series (Faris, 1970). But times had changed.

(6) On Halbwachs’ familiarity with the *Statistique Générale de la France* government department, see Lenoir (2004).

(7) For a critical edition of these articles,

see Topalov (2005a). They are referenced here (as in that edition) as *Lettres I-VIII*.

(8) My thanks to Olivier Corpet for making available to me the materials at the *Institut Mémoires de l’Édition Contemporaine (IMEC)*. The Halbwachs archives include two letters to his mother and one each to his first son Francis, his sister Marcelle, and his father-in-law Victor

letters were written over several days, and altogether they form a kind of journal covering the period from the departure from Le Havre on September 30, 1930, to his return by way of the same port on December 31.<sup>(9)</sup>

We first examine the circumstances and conditions in which the French sociologist came to teach at the University of Chicago. We then follow his movements within the local university networks, reconstituting the position he occupied vis-à-vis the sociology department, which was undergoing a major shakeup at the time. Lastly, we observe Halbwachs applying his methods to the city of Chicago, which allows for drawing a clear distinction between his sociology practices and those of Park, Burgess and their students.

### Why did Halbwachs go to Chicago?

Halbwachs was invited to the University of Chicago as a visiting professor of sociology for the Fall 1930 quarter.<sup>(10)</sup> Why was he invited and why did he accept?

The invitation may be considered one in a long series of trips abroad by French academics, and it follows the general shape of this series very closely. Halbwachs, who was fluent in German, had spent two long study periods in Germany, first at Göttingen as a young philosophy professor (1902-1903), later in Berlin, and in Vienna (1910-1911). For him as for most of his fellow students at the *École Normale Supérieure*, the only foreign country that counted at the time was Germany, though he did travel to the Middle East in

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Basch. Some of the letters to Yvonne were written over several days; the reference adopted here is the date of the cited passage. "To Y, 10/30" indicates "letter to Yvonne Halbwachs, Oct. 30, 1930). When a reference such as "(Sept. 30)" is given, this is the date of the event in question rather than the letter itself. I consulted these archives in 1997, so I do not use the classification determined after that date. Halbwachs' correspondence has already been used by Jean-Christophe Marcel (1999).

(9) I used two minor supplements to these documents: 1) an exchange of letters with Albert Thomas, Halbwachs' friend at the *École Normale*, written during and after the Chicago stay; after serving as a socialist MP and minister, Thomas had become director of the *Bureau International du Travail* in Geneva; these letters are preserved in the Albert Thomas archives of the *Archives Nationales* (94 AP 381; hereafter indicated *AN*), and 2) the

University of Chicago archives (Department of Special Collections, The Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago; hereafter indicated JRL), which I consulted to get an idea of how Halbwachs was viewed by his hosts –though for this they were rather disappointing since they contain only papers on official decisions around the invitation and an intense exchange between Halbwachs and University and sociology department authorities about the material conditions of his stay. The Park, Burgess and Ogburn archives contain no exchanges with Halbwachs, though the correspondence for Ogburn was copious during the period (JRL, *Park Papers*, Addenda Box 1, Folder 15 [Correspondence Fei-Haz]; *Ogburn Papers*, Box 29, Folder 6 [Correspondence G-I, General]).

(10) "The Board of Trustees", John F. Moulds, Secretary of the Board, 3, July, p. 197, in *The University Record* (n.s., 1930, 16 [JRL]).

1927 to supervise the *baccalauréat* examination.<sup>(11)</sup> These were the only foreign countries he had visited before his stay in America.<sup>(12)</sup> But though he continued to review several German publications for *L'Année Sociologique* and the *Annales* after World War I, when he went abroad to teach it was not to Germany but the United States. As Christophe Charle has shown, French academics in general were reorienting themselves this way, a fact which significantly increased the amount of traveling they did. If we look separately at two cohorts of professors from the Paris faculty of letters, appointed respectively in the periods 1879-1908 and 1909-1939, we see that 49% of the later cohort taught abroad at least once during their career, as opposed to 9% for the earlier cohort. The US played an important role in this development, accounting for 23% of the second cohort's travel, while Germany ceased entirely to be a destination (Charle, 1994b, p. 355, p. 357). With Charle once again (1994a) we can distinguish between two types of travelers: "ambassadors" of French literary culture, and "specialists" in scholarly disciplines. The first type were more likely to teach at Columbia or Harvard and gave many general-audience lectures, while the second type went to such universities as Yale, Chicago, Michigan, Stanford and Berkeley and gave courses for a period of several weeks or a quarter, in some cases for longer periods. Clearly Halbwachs belonged to this second group. He taught according to the usual norms operative in North American universities and gave no more than three general lectures, two in French and in Francophile circles in town, the third at the University of Chicago's *Maison Française*.<sup>(13)</sup> The irritation he expressed on seeing Lévy-Bruhl received at the university like a star during a brief visit (to Y, 11/8) was perhaps not unrelated to a muted feeling of rebellion against the difficult ordeal he was undergoing, which contrasted sharply with the older model of cultural diplomacy.

### Why was Halbwachs invited to Chicago?

Halbwachs was officially invited to Chicago by Ellsworth Faris, chairman of the sociology department, in a letter received in Strasbourg in March or April 1930. Faris was Halbwachs' correspondent for determining the conditions under which he would teach and stay; he also proposed the subjects

(11) On that occasion Halbwachs wrote to Thomas: "I'm getting ready for a long journey.[...] Since I'm hardly a big traveler like you, this is a real event in my life" (MH to Thomas, Strasbourg, Apr. 12, 1927, AN). The *baccalauréat* jury took him to Egypt and Syria (Beirut) around June 1927; this is also probably when he first visited Jerusalem.

(12) However, his first teaching post after passing the *agrégation* in philosophy was the Lycée de Constantine, Algeria (December 1901-May 1902). His notebooks mention several visits to Germany while he was a professor at Strasbourg: Frankfurt in November

1926, Mainz in December 1936 and "an automobile excursion to the country around Bad" in October 1929 (Cahier I [1923-1936], 73-74, 76, 110-111, IMEC).

(13) Halbwachs gave a (free) lecture entitled "*Souvenirs de Strasbourg*" at the University's *Maison Française* (Nov. 20) and a lecture on the same subject at the home of a Mrs. Shannon in the "rich society of North Shore" (Nov. 24), for which he was paid \$25. He also gave a talk at the *Alliance Française* entitled "*La psychologie du rêve en France*" (Dec. 6) (to Y, 11/20, 11/22, 12/6).

Halbwachs would teach, ultimately confirming them without consulting the French professor because the course program had to go to the printer's.<sup>(14)</sup> What is clear from the correspondence is that Halbwachs had not sought to be invited and at the time had no other contact at the University of Chicago, at least no one who could advise him in his negotiations with the institution or for resolving practical problems.<sup>(15)</sup>

We do not know who decided to invite Halbwachs or why, but we can make some fairly firm conjectures. We know that Faris asked Halbwachs to teach two courses:

“1. Modern French sociology. This could be a discussion of Tarde and Durkheim and the developments of their successors.

2. Suicide. The appearance of your excellent book on the subject made us think that you would like to take a group of students and lecture intensively on this subject. If it meets with your approval I am sure they would enjoy it.”<sup>(16)</sup>

These proposals were not directly linked to Faris' own scholarly specialties; his field was social psychology. Trained at Texas Christian University, Ellsworth Faris (1874-1953) had worked for a long time as a missionary in the Belgian Congo, then taught at his alma mater (1904-1911), before obtaining a doctorate in philosophy and psychology at the University of Chicago in 1914. An institution manager who never published a book throughout his career, Faris had succeeded the founder of the sociology department Albion Small in his two main functions: department chairman (1925) and editor of the *American Journal of Sociology* (1926). Faris was interested in French sociology and taught a quarter-long course on it himself.<sup>(17)</sup> His son, Robert E. Lee Faris, had completed an MA thesis in 1930 entitled *The Development of the Philosophy Underlying the Durkheim School of Social Theory* (Faris, 1970, p. 148) and he later became Halbwachs' student (to Y, 11/2). Faris thus had

(14) (Halbwachs wrote to his American correspondents in French and they wrote to him in English.) MH [to Ellsworth Faris], Apr. 30, 1930 (reply to the unfound letter of invitation); May 17, 1930; May 29, 1930 (reply to an unfound letter of May 16); June 11, 1930 (reply to a June 6 telegram); handwritten note, n.d. (perhaps an addendum to the previous reply) and MH [to Emery Filbey, Assistant to the President], Aug. 10, 1930 (reply to a letter of July 19); Ellsworth Faris to MH, June 6, 1930 (reply to May 17 letter) and June 6, 1930 (Western Union cable), June 11, 1930 (reply to May 29 letter); Emery Filbey to MH, July 19, 1930 and Aug. 30, 1930 (JRL, *President's Papers*, 1925-1945, Box 108, Folder 10 [Sociology Department 1929-39]).

(15) Halbwachs was extremely concerned about lodging; with no local contacts to help him, he turned to Faris (MH [to E. Faris], Apr. 30, 1930). His only other resource seems to

have been a professor named Vigneron who taught in the Romance languages department; Bouglé had given him Vigneron's name (MH [to E. Faris], June 28, 1930); Vigneron directed Halbwachs to the University Housing Bureau (Edythe L. Flack [Secretary, President's Office] to Mr. P. R. Vigneron [Department of Romance Languages], July 15, 1930; MH [to E. Filbey], Aug. 10, 1930) (JRL, *President's Papers*, 1925-1945, Box 108, Folder 10 [Sociology Department 1929-39]).

(16) Faris to MH, June 6, 1930.

(17) Faris' courses for 1930-1931 were “Human nature” (three or four quarters), “Research problems in social psychology” (same length), “Social origins” (Winter quarter), “Modern French sociology” (Spring quarter) (JRL, The University of Chicago, *Announcements*, 1930, 30, 18, pp. 93-104, March 5, 1930, hereafter indicated *Announcements*).



the information necessary for identifying Halbwachs within the landscape of French sociology.<sup>(18)</sup> Moreover, that year the department had no courses on history of sociology or European sociology.<sup>(19)</sup> Halbwachs's course, entitled "Modern French sociology", thus fit perfectly into the university's basic teaching needs. As mentioned, Faris asked him to teach a course on suicide to a group of graduate students. Halbwachs's book on the topic, in which he revisited this major subject of Durkheim's, had just been published (1930), but it is important to try to understand why this aspect of his work had drawn attention and perhaps why Halbwachs himself was chosen. It seems reasonable to assume that his recognized expertise in statistics played a determining role.

Upon his arrival in Chicago Halbwachs was met and taken in charge by another department professor, William F. Ogburn. Halbwachs called Ogburn by phone as soon as his train from New York arrived in Chicago, and Ogburn immediately took him to visit the Social Science Research Building. The next day, which was also Halbwachs's first day of teaching, Ogburn set him up at a desk in the university library and took him to meet the department: "Ogburn introduced me to a bunch of people whose names I didn't catch and don't remember. I'll have to get all this organized little by little." He then took him for a drive—with Mrs. Ogburn at the wheel—to downtown Chicago—the Loop (to Y, 10/1). Ogburn was Halbwachs's guide throughout his stay, his constant interlocutor, even his nurse when he caught a momentarily demoralizing cold (to Y, 10/19). He took him to his formal meeting with the university president (to Y, 10/25). Lastly, aside from Faris, Ogburn was the only member of the department to invite Halbwachs to his home, and Mrs Ogburn took him around the city several times.<sup>(20)</sup> The correspondence attests to Halbwachs's gratitude,<sup>(21)</sup> all the way up to his departure: "The devil of a man and I both had tears in our eyes." (to Y, 12/19).

William F. Ogburn (1886-1959)<sup>(22)</sup> had been hired as a sociology professor at the University of Chicago in Fall 1927 to develop "the quantitative aspect of sociology" and "the statistical approach in a way not hitherto done at the university".<sup>(23)</sup> Trained at Columbia University (PhD 1912) by Franklin H.

(18) The University of Chicago library has original editions of all Halbwachs's books (except his short work on Leibniz, published 1907), probably acquired as soon as they were published.

(19) The usual graduate courses — "316: European sociology from the beginning of the nineteenth century", "317: History of sociology in the United States" and "415: Modern German sociology"— were not given in academic year 1930-1931 (*Announcements*).

(20) The only other invitation from a member of the department was to a dinner at Faris's (Nov. 3); Faris was on leave that quarter and teaching at another university. The Ogburns, who lived only a few minutes away

from the club where Halbwachs was staying, invited him first for tea (Oct. 30), then to Sunday lunch (Dec. 7). He took three automobile rides with Mrs. Ogburn (Oct. 1, Nov. 7 and Dec. 15).

(21) "He is a charming, good and generous man." (to Y, 10/4); "Ogburn was delightful." (to Y, 10/19). On Mrs. Ogburn: "You ultimately feel embarrassed by such boundless amiability." (to Y, 12/12).

(22) On Ogburn see "Questionnaire", 1 typed page, Oct. 31, 1940 (JRL, *Biographical Files*); Duncan (1964).

(23) Quotation from the *Society of Social Research Bulletin*, Mar. 1927. On Ogburn's appointment, see Bulmer (1984, pp. 170-171).

Giddings and Henry L. Moore, a statistics professor who helped found econometrics, Ogburn first taught sociology at Washington State University (1917-1918), then at Columbia (1919-1927). As a young scholar whose career began before the war, he was concerned about social and political reform: “I was much interested in socialism, and spent a good deal of time in radical circles”, he declared publicly upon retiring –precisely during the McCarthy era (quoted in Duncan 1964, p. ix). He was also a society man who had traveled regularly in Europe, the first time with his wife: “His wife’s book [she published two books on the Ogburn family] tells of his delight in Oxford, the Louvre, the Latin Quarter and the *Moulin Rouge* on his first trip”, noted Louis Wirth at his funeral.<sup>(24)</sup> During WWI Ogburn had worked at the National War Labor Board (1918-1919), the federal agency in charge of regulating agreements between employers and unions in the war industries; then for the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (1919) and the Bureau of Applied Economics in Washington, D.C. (1920). During this period he published numerous statistical reports on wages and cost of living, among them *Standards of living: a compilation of budgetary studies* (1920). In the 1920s he became interested in business cycles, the family, social change, and became a major figure of North American social science; he served as editor of the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* (1920-1926), later becoming president of the Statistical Association (1931) and president of the American Sociological Association (1929). In 1929 he became co-director of the new Social Science Research Council, the committee that managed Rockefeller Foundation programs in the field, and he was a friend of Robert M. Hutchins, the new University of Chicago president. Ogburn was named Director of Research (1930-1933) when President Hoover formed the Committee on Social Trends, a group of scholars charged with reflecting on the future of the country now in the depths of the Great Depression.

So Halbwachs’ real host in Chicago was Ogburn, and it had probably been Ogburn’s idea to invite him. There is every reason to think that the two men had met beforehand. When Halbwachs mentioned his colleague in his first Chicago letter to Yvonne (to Y, 10/1), he called him “Ogburn” as if he were a long-time common acquaintance.<sup>(25)</sup> He similarly referred to “the Jaffés” (to Y, 10/13). The Jaffés and the Ogburns were the first to invite him to their homes. The most plausible explanation for this familiarity is that the Halbwachs had met the two couples in France when Ogburn, still a professor at Columbia, and his assistant William Jaffé were there studying the post-war French economy. This study was done for the Columbia University Council for Research in the Social Sciences, with financial assistance from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, i.e., the Rockefeller foundation particularly engaged in funding the social sciences. Ogburn was in Paris in December 1925; the funding enabled him to prolong his stay in France until

(24) *William Fielding Ogburn, 1886-1959. Speakers at a Memorial Service*, June 8, 1959, p. 5 (JRL, *Biographical Files*).

(25) In contrast to the way he mentioned

unknown persons: “a guy named [such and such]” or “[So and so], a pleasant young sociologist”.

September 1926, benefiting all the while from collaboration with Jaffé, a young Canadian economist living in Paris with his wife, she herself a student and involved in the work.<sup>(26)</sup> For their survey they met with industrialists, French administrative officials and “colleagues teaching in French universities” (Ogburn and Jaffé, 1929, p. vi). They were in close contact in Paris with François Simiand and Charles Rist,<sup>(27)</sup> and we know that the path leading from Simiand to Halbwachs was a short one.

Several Frenchmen from Durkheim’s group were also known to the men then steering social sciences at the University of Chicago. Starting in 1924–1925, Rockefeller Foundation initiatives to assist Europe in developing social science research institutes and programs were instrumental in bringing to the United States not only French graduate students but also some of their professors. This was the case for Marcel Mauss, the historian Paul Mantoux, and the geographer Désiré Pasquet.<sup>(28)</sup> It was also the case for Célestin Bouglé, who was looking for support for his *Centre de Documentation Sociale* at the *École Normale Supérieure* and was invited to Chicago by the political scientist Charles Merriam for the December 1929 opening of the Social Science Research Building (Bouglé, 1930). He later received a subsidy for his Centre, as did Lévy-Bruhl for his *Institut d’Ethnologie* (Mazon, 1985, pp. 328–339). Though Halbwachs was a total stranger to these scientific-academic diplomacy maneuvers, he may indirectly have benefited from this network.<sup>(29)</sup> In any case, it is perfectly clear that he was not aware of the existence of Park and Burgess before meeting them in Chicago.<sup>(30)</sup>

### **Why did Halbwachs accept the invitation?**

Halbwachs replied immediately to Faris’ first letter: “Many thanks for the invitation you have been kind enough to send me, it is a particular honor for

(26) See Carlton J. H. Hayes [secretary of the Council for Research in the Social Sciences] to Beardsley Ruml [director of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund], Dec. 26, 1925, and Hayes to Dr. Nicholas M. Butler [president of Columbia University], Feb. 18, 1926 (*Rockefeller Archives*, LSRM Box 50, Folder 528). While Hayes’ letter attests to the fact that Mrs. Grace Jaffé was in Paris with her husband, it is very likely that Mrs. Ogburn was too: her husband was scheduled to stay in France for a long time; she liked France and had already spent much time there with him before the war.

(27) See Hayes to Butler, Feb. 18, 1926. In his letter Hayes repeatedly refers to Simiand as “Professor Simeone”.

(28) “Analysis of visiting professor expenses”, n.d. [Dec. 1, 1927] (LSRM Box 67,

Folder 709). Other beneficiaries: Pierre Bovet, E. Deller, Paul Devinat. On Mauss’ May 1926 trip and his brief encounters in Chicago, see Fournier (1994, pp. 527–532).

(29) However, the sociologists do not seem to have noticed Maurice Fréchet’s quarter-long stay at Chicago in 1924. Fréchet was a mathematics professor at Strasbourg who had co-written an introductory text on probability with Halbwachs (1924) (MH mentioned Fréchet’s stay to Faris, Apr. 30, 1930, JRL).

(30) Park had replaced Faris as chairman of the department for summer quarter 1930; he was therefore most certainly informed about Halbwachs’ impending visit. As noted above, however, there is no trace of any exchange between Park and Halbwachs, either before or after his stay in Chicago (JRL, *Park Papers*).

me. [...] We have a great deal to learn from you.”<sup>(31)</sup> Before answering in the affirmative, however, he wanted to be sure that the salary offered would allow him to live comfortably in Chicago. He also asked at first to be housed for free by the university. But he did not maintain this attitude. Two weeks after receiving the invitation and even before receiving Faris’ answer to his demands, he accepted the offer as it was.<sup>(32)</sup> He proceeded in the same way with regard to the number of course hours, insisting first on reducing them but capitulating as soon as the assistant to the University president explained that he could either take or leave the offer. Clearly he wanted to make this trip to the United States. On May 6, 1930 he wrote a kind of paragraph-long synopsis of his life in his diary, a passage in which the journey to America takes on special significance:

The divorce came at the end of 1908, but the separation dates from August 1907; I was 30. I had gotten married in October 1901, i.e., at age 24, precisely the year I took the *agrégation* [a highly competitive examination leading at the time to a *lycée* teaching post] after graduating from the *École Normale*. I’ve been married to Yvonne for exactly 17 years now. In 1913 I was 36. I must go to the United States next October. Touch wood.<sup>(33)</sup>

It is unlikely that he was motivated by a desire to teach. His teaching hours, which he considered exorbitant compared to French conventions, came as a real shock: “I’m going to have taught 95 class sessions –more than an entire year in Strasbourg” (to Y, 12/6). In fact, he considered the teaching an ordeal –though one he seems to have gotten through successfully: “I started this morning. [...] It went very well. I’ve only got a few students for the time being –15. They were very attentive, didn’t make fun, understood me perfectly –they were beyond reproach. It seems to me that thanks to my English lessons, all will work out [perfectly] [the last word is scratched out].” (to Y, 10/1). He was also concerned to make a little money. Halbwachs had no family fortune, and he kept careful records of his income and expenditures. He seemed pleased to be able to show his wife that the adventure showed a credit balance (to Y, 11/2).

He also wanted to see new things: “I’m getting informed, renewing my knowledge –sometimes I read a book a day.” (to Y, 11/8). At one difficult moment, he put in words for his wife what he was looking for from the trip and the price that had to be paid: “I’ll never leave you again. I’m depriving myself of the greatest joys: seeing you, seeing the children. All to increase my surface area a bit, because I’m seeing and reading a lot of things here. [...] This trip to America is a chore and an ordeal.” (to Y, 10/20). Halbwachs also wanted to use the stay to do some research of his own. Before leaving for the US he wrote to Faris: “I would like [...] to have a little time to study your organization and do some sociological research there.”<sup>(34)</sup> On his return he wrote to Thomas: “Here in Chicago I’ve been entirely taken up by the University and urban sociology research, and so have hardly been able to follow the

(31) MH to [Ellsworth Faris], Apr. 30, 1930 (JRL).

(32) MH to [Ellsworth Faris], May 17, 1930 (JRL).

(33) Cahier I, 1923-1936, sheet 122 (IMEC).

(34) MH to [Ellsworth Faris], May 29, 1930 (JRL).

latest surveys on the living conditions of wage workers in America or collect data on that subject.”<sup>(35)</sup> (to T, 01/19/31). We would be wrong to think that Halbwachs was “doing fieldwork”, as we say today. He was looking for facts in books, in accordance with a well-established approach to research that he and his colleagues had long applied. He spent hours at the university library, dazzled by the wealth of its collections. We do not know in detail what he read, but we know he read in extremely diverse subjects that encompassed the economist Mitchell’s studies of the business cycle; Robert and Helen Lynd’s renowned study of a small town in Indiana, *Middletown*, which he used heavily (without citing it) in two of his articles for the *Progrès (Lettres III and IV)*; Malinowski’s *Argonauts*, one of “the books I looked for in vain in Strasbourg” (to Y, 10/20 and 11/8). To judge by the reviews he published prior to 1930 –of pre-war studies of family budgets; then from 1923-1929, reviews of works by institutionalist economists (Commons, Veblen, a work by Teilhac on nineteenth-century economists), a study of mathematical statistics and papers from a eugenics conference held in Baltimore– he was not at all familiar with North American social science research. The first body of material he probably read in Chicago was family budget studies, which he mentions in his October 13 article for the *Progrès de Lyon (Lettre II)*. This is an interesting detail: just as he had gone directly to studies on this subject upon his arrival in Berlin in Fall 1910, so he was quick to consult North American studies on it after arriving in Chicago. What could be more reassuring, after the emotional stir of the journey, than books on a familiar subject?

The trip to the United States may also reasonably be understood as part of his effort to accelerate his career. As was the case for many professors of his generation, his career had developed rather slowly. Halbwachs had only moved on from secondary school teaching at age 41 (1918) and had only become university professor (in 1919) thanks to the refounding of the French university in Strasbourg after the defeat and departure of the Germans –and a probable recommendation from Albert Thomas to Millerand, the French proconsul in the recovered territories. In 1930 he was 53, and like most professors in faculties of letters outside Paris, he aspired to be appointed to a university position in the capital.<sup>(36)</sup> His personal publications had developed recently in two directions: collective psychology, with *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), and statistics. He had co-written a probability calculus textbook with Fréchet in 1924, republished *Expropriations* in 1928, published *Les causes du suicide* in 1930. In 1925 the Institut awarded him the Prix Montyon in statistics. While writing his theses Halbwachs had been a sort of figures *bricoleur* (Topalov, 1999); he had now become a recognized statistics specialist, and he clearly thought this was his strongest suit.<sup>(37)</sup> He wrote to

(35) MH to Thomas, Strasbourg, Jan. 19, 1931 (AN).

(36) On the slow careers of French academics during the period, see Charle (1987, pp. 226-248). On academics’ “going up” to

Paris, see Clark (1973, ch. 2).

(37) On Halbwachs as a statistician, see Brian and Jaisson (2004), Jaisson and Brian (2005).

Thomas from Chicago that the Sorbonne was requesting the creation of a chair in statistical sociology: “If the ministry [creates the chair], that might be the door I could get through. All of this is uncertain, and for the moment my sole ambition is to work.”<sup>(38)</sup> Likewise, when he learned of the death of Georges Renard, who held the labor history chair at the Collège de France, he indicated that Simiand should take that post: “At the moment it doesn’t interest me.” (to Y, 10/30). Halbwachs did apply for the new sociology chair at the Collège de France, with the intention of coming in second behind Mauss. He wrote numerous “campaign” letters from Chicago in October and received a goodly number of favorable replies.<sup>(39)</sup> He ultimately did very well in this contest.<sup>(40)</sup>

It is of course impossible to assess to what degree Halbwachs’ stay in the United States accelerated his career. It does seem that honors began to come his way on that basis, honors that had been missing until then. One direct result of the trip was that in February 1931 he began collaborating with Albert Thomas at the Bureau International du Travail.<sup>(41)</sup> In August 1932, he was appointed to the Comité Technique des Sciences Humaines (social sciences section) of the Caisse Nationale des Sciences and in the same year he became a correspondent of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques. In November 1934, he was appointed to the 8<sup>th</sup> section of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Recherche Scientifique* (philosophical and social sciences) and in 1935 he was coopted into the Institut International de Statistique. Consecration came in July 1935 with a post at the Sorbonne, the history of social economy chair founded by the Count de Chambrun (Weisz, 1979). However, Halbwachs remained remote from the organization of social science research that was being propelled in France by the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1930s, despite the fact that for a moment –and without knowing it– he had been at the very center of this setup.<sup>(42)</sup>

(38) MH to Thomas, Chicago, Dec. 3, 1930 (AN). At its May 24, 1930 assembly, on Bouglé’s suggestion, the faculty of letters “expressed the wish that a statistical sociology course” be created (*Registre des Actes de la Faculté des Lettres*, AN: AJ16 4755; cited in Marcel, 2001p. 211). The ministry did not comply.

(39) Halbwachs kept his wife informed on this (to Y, 10/13, 10/15, 10/25, 11/22, 12/5).

(40) The chair, created June 15, 1930, replaced the chair of social philosophy left vacant when Izoulet died. On November 29, Mauss obtained 24 votes (of 36) on the first round; Halbwachs got 22 votes on the second

round (Fournier, 1996). He wrote to Thomas at the time: “It seems I was elected second to Mauss.” (MH to Thomas, Chicago, Dec. 3, 1930, AN).

(41) Thomas to MH, Geneva, Jan. 22, 1931; MH to Thomas, Strasbourg, Jan. 31, 1931; Thomas to MH, Geneva, Nov. 20, 1931 (AN).

(42) Charles Rist brought Halbwachs in later (1935) to help design the unemployment survey conducted by the Institut de Recherches Économiques et Sociales, an institution put in place with Rockefeller Foundation support (my thanks to Ludovic Tournès for this information).

## Halbwachs at the University of Chicago

We now know a bit more about the conditions in which the French sociologist was invited to Chicago and his reasons for accepting the invitation. To tie together the two threads of this description, it is worthwhile decentering the viewpoint and briefly observing the Chicago sociology department in 1930. Retrospectively, we are much better informed than Halbwachs about the institution that received him and the conflicts within it at the time.

### *A divided sociology department*

The University of Chicago sociology department in 1930, recently separated from anthropology (1929), was small. It was made up of 5 professors (Faris, Park, Burgess, Ogburn and Sutherland) and 2 instructors (Blumer and Cressey); a total of 7 teachers, as opposed to 24 in history, 13 in political science, 12 in economics –but there were only 6 in anthropology.<sup>(43)</sup> Despite its reduced volume, the sociology department was profoundly divided as an institution along intellectual lines. We are familiar with the different sources of inspiration running through the department since its origins, but in 1930, two clear-cut camps seem to have formed.<sup>(44)</sup> Philip Hauser, then a student, remembered later (1966): “There were blocks among the students as well as among the professors. At the annual departmental picnic even the opposing teams in the baseball game were the ‘case studiers’ and the ‘statisticians’.”<sup>(45)</sup>

Halbwachs related how Ogburn had explained “the history of American sociology” to him:

He deliberately buried the generation preceding him: the Giddings, Smalls, etc. Mac Dougal, famous ten years ago, was definitively on the dustheap. There are four movements now. *Sociologie de culture* [sic] (primitive culture, savages, etc.): ‘M. Mauss couldn’t understand what it is, even though he knows English well.’ Quantitative sociology (that’s Ogburn). Psychological sociology (my book on memory is apparently much appreciated by this group). Lastly, ‘practical sociology’. That’s Park and Burgess: delinquent children, the disorganized milieus of big cities, the Hobo (never been able to understand what that is: the name of a savage, I think. But they often add “-hemia”, which produces a play on words: *hobohemia*, the bohemians, the declassed). You see how funny it all is.” (to Y, 12/5).<sup>(46)</sup>

(43) *Announcements* (p. 46, p. 66, p. 76, p. 93, p. 105). There were also 3 outside teachers who came to teach during summer quarter.

(44) This description is largely based on retrospective accounts from the 1960s, a time when the conflict between “quantitative” and “qualitative” sociology had assumed stereotypical forms. Thirty years earlier, the positions may have been less entrenched.

(45) Philip M. Hauser (University of Chicago) “Ernest Watson Burgess – the human being” (pp. 25-30) in *Ernest Watson Burgess, 1886-1966. Four Talks Given at a Memorial Service*. University of Chicago, 1967, pp. 26-27 (JRL, *Biographical Files*, E. W. Burgess). Hauser, who obtained his Ph.D. in 1933, had

chosen the statisticians’ side.

(46) The term “sociology of culture” implied a meaning of the French word *culture* that was only adopted by specialists several decades later. In 1950, for example, Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* was translated *Échantillons de civilisation* (Paris, Gallimard, trans. Raphaël Weill). The term *hobo* designated migrant workers who traveled great distances by rail, doing anything from harvesting to lumbering or construction site work. They were studied at Chicago by Nels Anderson (1923). *Hobohemia* designated the milieu created by the encounter between artistic bohemia and the *hobo* world, and the urban area this encounter occurred in.

This description coincides fairly exactly with the organization of the department into fields or course groups. Their relative dynamism in 1930 is indicated by the numerical ratio between scheduled courses and courses actually given in the year.<sup>(47)</sup> Faris' field was made up of two groups of courses that no one else wanted to teach: "social psychology" and "theory of culture" (four courses given, fourteen not), themes more likely to be developed in other departments. Park and Burgess' field, much more solid, had nonetheless been weakened; it included "the community and social institutions" and "social pathology" (fourteen courses given, ten not). Lastly, Ogburn's field, in a minority position but booming, was called "statistics and population" (nine courses given, two not). The situation was undergoing rapid change, and these trends only became more pronounced. This is surely why in most later historical accounts –generally written from the "case studies" perspective– the golden age is said to have come to an end precisely in 1930.<sup>(48)</sup> The other camp, of course, saw this moment as the beginning of a new era: "Statistics became the great tool and is the analogue of the laboratory in natural science", observed Ogburn in his 1956 retrospective assessment (p. 399).

The policy of the university and the Rockefeller Foundation were radically reoriented in 1927 (Bulmer, 1980). Until that time, the Local Community Research Committee (LCRC), composed of representatives of the different social science departments, had allocated project grants through the Laura Spelman Memorial Fund (LSMF). This is how Burgess had been able to develop his program, "Local Communities of Chicago" (begun in 1924), which constituted the framework for most of the surveys done by his students and Park's. From 1927-1928, members of the executive committee began criticizing this funding policy. The first critics were the Memorial Fund director Beardsley Ruml and university president Max Mason, who were relayed by committee secretary and political scientist Leonard White and others, including the political scientist Merriam, the economist Millis, and Ogburn the sociologist. Park and Burgess' projects as well as others developed in the department were considered too individual and their methods not scientific enough. These tensions developed into a crisis that led in 1929 to a complete organizational rehaul, which went into effect the following June. The LSMF was absorbed into the Rockefeller Foundation; the LCRC was replaced by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), whose members were hired at a national level, headed by a research committee composed of four members and an executive secretary.<sup>(49)</sup> One of the first measures taken by the new SSRC was to terminate Burgess' program on the local communities of Chicago. So the year 1929-1930, which marked the end of the LCRC, was both the apogee of Park and Burgess' research program and the beginning

(47) See *Announcements* (pp. 98-102) for the course list and courses given in academic year 1930-1931.

(48) For M. Bulmer, for example (1984, p. 43) and in 1932 for R. E. L. Faris (1970).

(49) The research committee was composed

of Edith Abbott (social work), Charles Merriam (political science), Harry A. Millis (political economy) and Edward Sapir (anthropology); executive secretary Donald Schlesinger (JRL, "Social Science Research Committee Records, 1923-1964," File-in-Aid, p. 1).



of its decline. Robert M. Hutchins, the new university president appointed in 1929, decided to organize the departments into divisions, and in January 1931, Beardsley Rummler, former head of the LSMF, became dean of the social sciences division.<sup>(50)</sup>

The aim of these changes was to gain firmer control over how Rockefeller funds were used in the social sciences while promoting the new scientific approach defined by Rummler, Hutchins, White, Ogburn and a few others; namely, to bring closer together (to the point of uniting) the social sciences around common objectives –studying social problems– and a common method –quantitative analysis. Ogburn had long been firm on this point. In 1922, for example, he wrote: “We cannot have science without measurement. And science will grow in the social studies in direct ratio to the use of measurement.” (p. 62). This went together with a critique of the methods preferred by his department colleagues. In 1927 he wrote: “Much descriptive work in sociology is not very careful or thorough, bearing some resemblance to reporting work for contemporary journals. Careless description is very much to be deplored in sociology, and the situation is ripe for the application of statistics.” (1927b, p. 382). Ogburn also pled the cause of “pragmatic reunification and cooperation” since “the social problems of a living society are no respecters of academic and methodological distinctions” (1927a, p. 9). Rummler and the group now running the social sciences for the Rockefeller empire soon adopted precisely these arguments (Rummler, 1930).

It is in this context that we have to understand the University of Chicago’s hiring of Ogburn in 1927 and his increasing importance within the sociology department, the SSRC, and North American social science of the 1930s. The actors involved felt they were participating in a nation-wide movement to renew sociology on what were at last scientific foundations. Stouffer, one of Ogburn’s first students, remembered thirty years later how unaware Park and Burgess’ students were of the change that was under way: “It was in autumn 1927, when the students in sociology at the University of Chicago first met [Ogburn]. It was a rather smug group of students, who no more would argue the supremacy of Chicago sociology than an Englishman of that day would argue the supremacy of the British Empire. [...] the remarkable development at Columbia in the application of statistics [...] had left Chicago sociology sublimely untouched.”<sup>(51)</sup> But things were changing fast. Park was often on leave in 1931 and 1932, and he retired in 1934. Burgess remained active, but his interests shifted from local communities to the family and social pathology, and statistical methods took on increasing importance in his work. Ogburn had fulfilled his mission.

(50) “Brief records of the quarter”, The University of Chicago, *Announcements* (1931, 1, Jan., pp. 71-76).

(51) *William Fielding Ogburn, 1886-1959*,

*Speakers at a Memorial Service*, June 8, 1959 (20-page brochure), p. 9 (JRL, *Biographical Files*).

### *Halbwachs in the university networks*

There is no indication that Halbwachs himself had the slightest idea of the change under way, though at the end of his stay an economist colleague explained to him something of what was going on:

He filled me in on the major transformation in progress at the University of Chicago. They treat their universities a little like automobiles; i.e., if after driving one for awhile they don't think it's running the way it should, they don't hesitate to fix it, change it, even reconstruct it entirely using a new model." (to Y, 12/16).

What is quite clear if we reconstitute the French sociologist's movements in the local university networks is that he was immediately and unhesitatingly enlisted in one of the two competing camps: the statisticians.<sup>(52)</sup>

Halbwachs' social life in Chicago was almost entirely limited to the university world. He was living on campus at the Quadrangle Club, where visitors to the university were housed and professors of all disciplines could come to eat and occasionally entertain.<sup>(53)</sup> Outside of strictly department-related activities, the French professor's social life consisted in lunch meetings or invitations to lunch at the club, invitations to colleagues' homes for tea, Sunday lunch or a dinner; lastly, a few automobile rides around the city.<sup>(54)</sup>

Halbwachs met with a number of academics from outside the sociology department. It is not always easy to determine how these meetings came about, but nearly all seem to have been arranged through previous French contacts. Mauss had given him introductions to "*anthropologistes* [sic]" (to Y, 12/26) that led to a few encounters early in his stay: "a guy named Sapir, whom Mauss introduced me to. Pleasant and intelligent. Linguist and ethnographer" (Oct. 15); "a guy from the ethnography museum" (Oct. 24); lunch at the Field Museum with a specialist of China named Laufer, "a friend of Mauss's" who knew Granet and Sylvain Lévy (Oct. 29).<sup>(55)</sup> This list seems to have exhausted Mauss's addressbook and there seem to have been no other contacts in these fields.

There were also many encounters with economists. Two young Francophile economists played the role of intermediary. The previously mentioned William Jaffé (1898-1980), whom Halbwachs had probably met in France with Ogburn and who was now assistant professor at Northwestern University, invited him twice to dinner (Nov. 13 and 22). Harry D. Gideonse,<sup>(56)</sup>

(52) We cannot assume that Halbwachs mentioned all his encounters to his wife. He does seem to have exhaustively noted those that took the form of a prearranged appointment, a meal at the club or in town, or a tour of the city.

(53) During Halbwachs' stay there were two "ladies' nights" in tuxedo: Thanksgiving (Nov. 26) and Christmas (Dec. 12). The club is at the intersection of 57<sup>th</sup> Street and University Avenue, very close to the Social Science Research Building.

(54) It was seldom the professors (all men)

who took Halbwachs out and they were never at the wheel; it was wives or young men and women.

(55) Edward Sapir (1884-1939) was professor of anthropology and general linguistics. Berthold Laufer (1874-1934), a tireless organizer of expeditions to collect objects in China, was curator of the Field Museum, Chicago's natural history museum.

(56) Halbwachs never managed to spell his name right (his letters show four different spellings, all wrong).

associate professor in economics at the University (born in 1901), married to a French woman and probably an acquaintance of Lévy-Bruhl, also invited Halbwichs twice to dinner (Nov. 2 and Dec. 16) and lunched with him twice at the club, once with Lévy-Bruhl (Nov. 5) and once with Paul H. Douglas (1892-1976), “a socialist” and professor of economics (Nov. 14). Probably through Ogburn, Halbwichs also met Henry Schultz (1893-1938), professor and specialist of mathematical economics, with whom he lunched at the club (Dec. 4) – “[He] certainly admired me a great deal (for [my book on] probability calculus)” (to Y, 12/12)– together with two other French-speaking economists from the department: John Nef, assistant professor and specialist of European economic history (born 1899), and Frank H. Knight (1885-1972), professor specializing in the history of economic thought. Altogether Halbwichs met most members of the University’s economics department: half of the full professors and a third of the lower-ranking teachers.

### *Halbwichs and the sociologists*

In contrast, Halbwichs’ relations with sociologists in the department he was teaching in were extremely limited, with the exception of Ogburn. He taught three mornings a week with a mid-morning break,<sup>(57)</sup> and the dates mentioned in his letters suggest that it was probably on his teaching days that he met informally with department members. He did not have an office in the social sciences building; rather “an isolated room and a desk” (to Y, 12/1) in the university library a few streets away, where he spent a great deal of time. He makes no mention in his correspondence of attending any colleagues’ lectures. However, he did visit the Social Science Research Building several times, “a handsome nine-story building with an elevator, numerous offices, spacious, light classrooms, fine furniture” (to Y, 10/1):

This morning, between my two classes, I went to study how the calculating machines work. They have a dozen of them, maybe more, in two connected offices. [...] It’s the great social science instrument. When you’re there you’re at the heart of their laboratory (to Y, 10/15).

All these women students look like they’re on a social mission. It’s incredible all the offices there are, and all the filing cabinets, files, young women in glasses busy inventing, filing, taking notes, writing reports, etc. (to Y, 11/12).

Halbwichs seems to have been fairly regularly present at the sociology department’s regular Thursday lunches.<sup>(58)</sup> He probably did not say much at them, and was probably not often brought into the conversation: “I get bored because I can’t always follow what they’re saying. But I distract myself by contemplating Park and Burgess.” (to Y, 12/18). But, the French professor found his students surprising and impressive. Twice they requested him to give an evening lecture (Nov. 10 and 24), once to the “graduate club”, who

(57) Courses were held Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 8-11am.

(58) He mentions the first and last of these lunches (Oct. 9 and Dec. 18).

asked him to “present my ideas on statistics” (to Y, 11/12) and once to “their social research society” (to Y, 11/20).<sup>(59)</sup>

Halbwachs gradually became acquainted with the various teachers in the department. As mentioned above, his contacts with the department chairman Faris were minimal; Faris had formally invited him but was teaching at another university that quarter.<sup>(60)</sup> We also know of his increasingly close relations with Ogburn. In contrast, his relations with Robert E. Park (1864-1944) and Ernest W. Burgess (1886-1966) remained distant, despite the fact that he met them early in his stay.

The visitor was initiated into human ecology by means of a brief presentation Ogburn gave him during his second day of classes. “He drew the following sketch [Chicago represented by five concentric zones marked with the figures 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10; 10 for the central Loop and 2 for the outermost circle]: this means that the average age of child criminals falls as you move from the center of Chicago (where it is 10) to the periphery, where it’s 2! What do you think of crimes committed by 2-year-olds? These American sociologists are funnier than Mark Twain. I’m going to have to go see Parker [sic] and Burgess, though, who are pursuing this type of study on a large scale, even though [...] I’ll have to climb up it.” (to Y, 10/2). Ogburn, who liked jokes and anecdotes, had in fact chosen to present human ecology to Halbwachs through a statistical result borrowed from a survey by Clifford A. Shaw published the previous year.<sup>(61)</sup> But Halbwachs’ misinterpretation of the meaning of the figures shows his complete ignorance of the studies in question and his readiness to believe anything and everything about the strange world of gangsters that at the time he had only been in for two days.

The next day Halbwachs was invited to lunch at the club by “a sociologist named Burgess, flanked by another named Park, who study Chicago and urban problems. The conversation with the latter was rather difficult due to his dreadfully nasal accent. I understood the former better. They promised to take me on a few walks through the slums [English word in the original], the black quarter, etc. I began reading an extremely strange study by one of their students on this very city” (to Y, 10/3).<sup>(62)</sup> Above and beyond this gesture of

(59) This was the Society for Social Research, founded by Park in 1916 as the Sociology Club of the University of Chicago (the name was changed in 1923). We do not know the topic Halbwachs spoke on since the society’s meeting minutes (usually very well kept and including a summary of all presentations) are missing for May 1930 to October 1931 (JRL, *Society for Social Research Papers*, Box 1, Folder 3).

(60) He was invited to dinner at the Faris’s (Nov. 3), and the young Robert E. Lee Faris, who was attending his courses, was present.

(61) Ogburn’s schema no doubt referred to the map representing the proportion of boys

aged 10-16 considered delinquent by the police, laid out as concentric circles of a mile in breadth. The rate was high in the transition zone near the Loop and decreased in the direction of the suburbs (Shaw, 1929, Zone Map II, p. 64).

(62) When Halbwachs arrived, seven books by Park and Burgess’s students had been published (not including V. M. Palmer’s methodological works). He mentions five in the *Annales* article: N. Anderson, *The Hobo* (1923), which Halbwachs read quite late (to Y, 12/5); F. M. Thrasher, *The Gang* (1927), from which he borrowed the ethnic map of Chicago; L. Wirth, *The Ghetto* (1928), which he quoted

welcome, they seldom met face to face. The promise of a walk through the “slums” was not kept and Halbwachs declined another dangerous visit: “They’re fearless, in fact. Burgess wanted to take me to a locale where you can meet murderers. That seemed to me a stupid idea, and I said no. Maybe I’m the idiot, but I think you’ll approve of my decision.” (to Y, 11/14).

The other two meetings with Burgess mentioned in the correspondence were formalities. On the occasion of a brief visit by Lévy-Bruhl to Chicago (Nov. 5), there was a luncheon at the club that brought together Halbwachs, Burgess, a young teacher in the economics department (Harry D. Gideonse) and two students who were taking Halbwachs’ course (R. E. L. Faris and Harmon P. Haynes). Burgess later invited Halbwachs to the club for a formal Thanksgiving dinner (Nov. 26) where there were “decolletés and tuxedos”, and we learn that Burgess’s sister was charming (to Y, 11/29). That would have been all, without the following unplanned encounter:

Today [a Saturday] as I was preparing to lunch alone, a sociologist named Park came to sit at my table. The guy must be about 60, with a forbidding physiognomy but a certain attractiveness too. He looks like a German philosopher. And he actually spent four years in Strasbourg, and he was a student of Windelbahd’s [“h” in the name crossed out].<sup>(63)</sup> He also looks a little like Pressensé.<sup>(64)</sup> But he’s one of the guys I have the most trouble understanding. He does urban sociology. When I went back to my room I was exhausted (to Y, 11/15).

The last Thursday lunch (Dec. 18) provided an occasion to sketch the pair in greater detail:

I distract myself by contemplating Park and Burgess. Burgess is thin, looks young (though he’s nearly 50); he either looks into space or else he suddenly fixes his eyes on you. A good teeth-baring smile, lips that lengthen into a kind of apish grin. Park is the spitting image of Teufelsdröck in *Sartor Resartus* or my “Stelson”,<sup>(65)</sup> a German or Slavic scholar with a large, peaceful, serious and slightly ironic face, deep, intelligent eyes behind his glasses –both metaphysician and journalist. This is the pair that gives Chicago sociology its picturesque, singular character: they represent urban sociology, and they’re the ones who have started the movement of monographic surveys of the ghetto, gangs, slums, “dilapidated areas”, etc. They’re totally original, and plunged into life. In close contact with the various groups, they seem totally ignorant of our theories. In this respect they are in the same situation as explorers and missionaries were in regard to Durkheim. I like them well enough, and actually admire them a little (to Y, 12/18).

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at length; and lastly H. W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929), which he mentioned in an article for the *Progrès (Lettre V)*. Two other works went unmentioned: E. R. Mowrer, *Family Disorganization* (1927) and R. S. Cavan, *Suicide* (1928), despite the subject. There is every reason to believe that the first book Halbwachs mentioned to Yvonne on the October 3 was Zorbaugh’s.

(63) Park had studied in Berlin (1899-1900), Strasbourg (a semester in 1900) and Heidelberg (1900-1903), where he wrote his

thesis under the direction of Wilhelm Windelbad (1848-1915).

(64) Francis de Pressensé (1953-1914), president of the *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme* from 1903 to 1914.

(65) Reference to a short story by Halbwachs (“Monsieur Stelson et moi,” first version 9 typed pages, n.d.; second version, 13 typed pages, n.d., *IMEC*). Herr Teufelsdröckh was a scholar character imagined by Thomas Carlyle (*Sartor Resartus*, 1838).

The contacts with younger teachers were few. There was a lunch with a “pleasant young sociologist” named Herbert Blumer, probably to prepare Halbwachs’ presentation that very evening at the “graduate club” (Nov. 10). Blumer (1900-1987) had taken a PhD in social psychology methods at the department in 1928 and was now an instructor. He belonged more to Faris’ sphere and had not participated in the LCRC programs. He too promised to take Halbwachs around in the car – “but lots of people told me they’d take me around in their cars and nothing’s come of it” (to Y, 11/12). Lastly, Halbwachs went to see McKenzie in his “office” (Dec. 4). Roderick K. McKenzie (1885-1940) was a former student of Parks’ who had just been hired as a professor at the University of Michigan and was chairman of the sociology department there. He had been associated since 1927 with the President’s Committee on Recent Social Trends and was visiting Chicago to work with Ogburn on the results of the census and his book, *The Metropolitan Community* (1933). Halbwachs was astounded by this meeting: “Mackenzie was busy sticking thumbtacks of various colors into a map of the US, as many thumbtacks as there were counties –and there are more than 1,000 counties! All in order ‘to visualise’ [English word in the original] the results of the last census. His wife doesn’t leave the office, probably because she is seconding him in this intelligent task. [...] I think the idea that they are doing true science is going to their heads. They seem somewhat punchdrunk. I had no difficulty simulating unbounded admiration.” (to Y, 12/4). This meeting was followed by an invitation to dinner (Dec. 6), after which Halbwachs noted: “He’s a guy working in urban sociology and my studies of Paris are of immediate interest to him.” (to Y, 12/7).

### “An original school of sociology”

Halbwachs did more than teach during his stay; he also assembled data for two research studies. The first was on what had been a favorite subject of his for twenty years: working-class family budgets. The information he collected at the library enabled him to write up an overview of recent studies on the subject in the United States for the *Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France* (Apr.-June 1931) immediately after his return to Strasbourg. The other study, which Halbwachs described to Thomas as a study in “urban sociology”, was published somewhat later, in January 1932. It is in his Chicago correspondence that we find the first occurrences in French of the term “*sociologie urbaine*”,<sup>(66)</sup> modeled directly on the English term “urban sociology”. This term had only recently come into use at the University of Chicago, first as the name of a course taught by Scott Bedford in 1924 and 1925; after which it was launched by Park at the 1925 annual convention of the American

(66) First mentions are found in MH to Y, 11/15, 12/6, 12/18; later in MH to Thomas, Strasbourg, Jan. 19, 1931 (AN).

Sociological Association.<sup>(67)</sup> But Halbwachs ceased using the term after returning to France.

### ***How should the city of Chicago be studied?***

In writing “Chicago, expérience ethnique”, Halbwachs was venturing into a field that his hosts had been plowing for years. He was in fact engaging with them in a controversy around the definition of sociology itself, expressing a position he had not been able to put forward when he was there (except in his own silent, sardonic thoughts), though the conversation was entirely virtual since the text was meant only for French readers.

For Halbwachs, as for Durkheim and Simiand before him, a singular fact was only of interest as the expression of a general law, and the sociological method had to be based on comparison. Chicago undoubtedly appeared unique, but this singularity was only seeming, because in all big cities the real question was the fact that industrial workers were not integrated into the city –i.e., into social life:

In Chicago, then (considered typical of major American urban areas), the problem raised is approximately the same as in more than one large, modern European city: adapting two very different communities to each other, communities without any close relations; coordinating two structures that fulfill distinct and virtually opposed necessities: an urban establishment in the form of an organism, and a set of industrial establishments with its attached population (1932, pp. 48-49).

In order to reach this conclusion, Halbwachs set up a series of comparisons between Chicago and other major cities, primarily Paris (Part I and conclusion); above all, a comparison of the various nationalities making up the population, the point being to measure their respective capacities for integration (Part III). The particularities of Chicago are described in one section only –Part II– in which the author presents both his personal observations and those of local sociologists. Halbwachs published two maps side by side. One was an “ethnic map of Chicago” that he had devised by reproducing a 1/150,000-scale map and superimposing the divisions that Frederic M. Thrasher had noted by hand on his 1/53,000-scale map of the gangs of Chicago in the version of his thesis published in 1927. For Halbwachs, however, in Chicago as in Paris, society was divided into social classes. There were of course striking contrasts “perceived on an excursion –however quick and superficial– through the streets of Chicago, contrasts between nationalities, oppositions between the races. [...] But we should not be overwhelmed by the external aspect, the features, the look, which change quickly, along with dress and under the influence of a homogeneous human milieu” (pp. 45-46). There was an antidote to these superficial impressions; namely, “numerical data”, “the best means of penetrating further into the social structure of

(67) In Topalov (2005b), I mistakenly attributed the innovation to Park in 1925. But we can expect another first occurrence to be discovered at some future time. On the label “urban sociology”, see Topalov (2008).

this city” (pp. 29-30). The overall conclusion is that the degree of “assimilation” of an immigrant group is proportional to the length of time it has been in the country. Degree of assimilation also varies by “economic category”:

It is not because they are foreigners, but because they are workers, and above all because they are manual workers for big industry, that the mass of immigrants is separated from urban life, excluded from the traditional, continuous current that carries along only the truly “bourgeois” [in quotation marks in the original] elements or those in close, familiar relations and contact with the bourgeoisie (p. 47).

“The overall picture of Chicago” thus “presents what is in fact the same subject as any modern urban area” (p. 46). This is why it was misleading to stress either observation of picturesque immigrant quarters or the use of ethnic distribution maps:

When you inscribe the names of races and nationalities on different districts, Chicago [...] looks like a mosaic. But let’s erase those names, and say simply that here there are a great many manual workers attached to big industry, and there there are craftsmen, skilled workers, tradesmen, “clerks” [in English in the original], office workers, etc. Instead of a set of juxtaposed districts, we see a series of superimposed social strata. But the most sedentary, the best established, those that really make up the heart and substance of the urban organism, are below the others, covered by the others, who partially prevent us from seeing them (p. 47).

To get beyond appearance, it was necessary to have a theory of society and an experimental method, and the local sociologists had neither. It was precisely because they went no further than describing the city in its individuality that they were not doing scientific work. We see that Halbwachs was not at all interested in the concepts and generalizations that Park had called “human ecology”.

### *Missionaries and urban sociologists*

We can now characterize more precisely how Halbwachs received the sociology of Park, Burgess and their students. Here is how he describes their studies in the *Annales* article:

Inquiries have already been undertaken on several of these aspects, and I would like to mention a few of the books presenting the results of those inquiries. They are descriptive works rather than scientific ones, uneven, disappointing sometimes, but often very picturesque, with images taken from life; [they are] unexpected, precious documents –in sum, a mine of facts brought to light by explorers who were not afraid to descend into the deepest underground galleries and push out to the very end of them.

Misters Park and Burgess, the two explorers who have inspired these studies of urban life, are very different. Mr Park studied philosophy in Germany; he worked for a time in journalism [...] His is a strong intellectual personality; he produces the ideas, suggestions and frames of classification for guiding researchers. Mr Burgess is of a very Anglo-Saxon mind and temperament and does not at all distinguish between the theoretical aspect and the practical interest of the research he is engaged in [...]. These two scholars are complementary, and it is no surprise that their collaboration should have produced a highly suggestive work (1932, p. 18).



The book Halbwachs mentioned was *The City*, a manifesto published in 1925 for the annual convention of the American Sociological Society (Park, Burgess and McKenzie, 1925):

This is surely a first attempt, an as-yet necessarily imperfect outline. This kind of work is so difficult; it demands a combination of such highly diverse qualities; it is so entirely lacking in the foundations that a tradition of scientific research and analysis can provide, for an object of study that has only just been discovered, that it is appropriate here to adopt a more curious than critical attitude, at least for the time being (1932, pp. 18-19).

We can sense in Halbwachs a kind of envious admiration for the audacity of researchers who went out to collect observations “from life” in society’s underworld –the underworld metaphor struck him as fitting, together with the travel-related category of the picturesque. But he never departed from the serene confidence of a European who thought he had inherited a scientific tradition that the Americans were lacking. This seems to have brought him relief along the order of what he felt looking at the paintings in the Chicago Museum of Fine Arts: “It seems to me that I alone have a right to contemplate what our masters painted, and that I can somehow take that right back from all these millionaires.” (to Y, 10/15).

Halbwachs considered Park and Burgess’ “‘practical’ sociology” (to Y, 12/5) to be about the same thing as the “applied sociology” of “social women” (here meaning women social workers) in the settlements (to Y, 11/16): “plunged into life [...] in close contact with the groups, they seem totally ignorant of our theories. In this respect they are in the same situation as explorers and missionaries were in regard to Durkheim” (to Y, 12/18). This analogy, which came spontaneously to Halbwachs’ mind, seems essential to me if we are to understand his relation to the Chicago sociologists. Despite the fact that they wrote “monographic studies”, collected “a mine of picturesque and precious facts”, they were not yet doing science. Science was the privilege of scholars whose task was to assemble facts observed by others, categorize them, compare them and formulate generalizations.

This model of the relation between science and observation had long been practiced in French universities, and not exclusively by the Durkheimians. Sociologists and ethnologists, like philologists, Orientalists and geographers, worked in the study, using information collected by explorers, prospectors, travelers, military men, colonial administrators and missionaries. To the extent possible, the scholars themselves determined a framework for the labor of collection. Mauss included “instructions for descriptive ethnography to be used by travelers, administrators and missionaries” in his courses.<sup>(68)</sup> This was also the aim of the Institut d’Ethnologie created by Lévy-Bruhl in 1925, and it was the founding principle of the Musée de l’Homme created by Paul Rivet in 1938. Mauss looked for justification of this understanding in the natural sciences: like zoology or geology, ethnography was a “science of observation” or an “outdoor science”; in this it was distinct from “laboratory sciences” (1913, p. 821). But though scholars need have nothing against using

(68) Notes published by Denise Paulme, *Manuel d’ethnographie* (1947) cited in L’Estoile (1996).

“concrete, picturesque” studies, they should not do such studies themselves. Nicolas Mariot has recently studied (2006) the highly critical reception by Robert Hertz’s Durkheimian colleagues of what may be called his ethnographic study of the cult of Saint Besse in the Val d’Aosta (1913), and the difficult situation the author found himself in with regard to the master for having published a mere “picturesque study”. Symmetrically, the same Durkheimians never failed to let amateur scholars know that they would do well not to try to go beyond such studies; above all, they should not try to make generalizations. Halbwachs himself called a retired inspector general of *Les Ponts et Chaussées* [national department of civil engineering] to order on this point in his 1929 review of a “small, precise study” of the population of the *Puy-de-Dôme* in the previous century:

The figures that Mr Callon reproduces and calculates are not without interest. But they would only deliver their meaning if they were related to other sets of figures. The framework of the *département* [basic French administrative unit] is really too narrow here. The author goes no further than statistical data, so this is neither a detailed, concrete, picturesque study nor a general overview (Halbwachs, 1929).

What enabled Halbwachs to find meaning in what Park and Burgess were doing was thus a specific and firmly established model of the division of labor, inscribed in institutions, symbolic hierarchies, argumentation forms, and untiringly reiterated in the ethnological literature of his time. It was precisely this model that would begin to fall apart when Malinowski launched his new definition of anthropology in 1929, declaring both that that science should be used to reform British colonial government and that its content and methods themselves should be redefined: to observe change, it was imperative to abolish the separation between working in the library or study and working in the field (L’Estoile, 1994). This was the British birth of fieldwork, contemporaneous with its North American birth in Chicago –not in the department of sociology, but in the neighboring department of anthropology with, among others, Robert Redfield’s study of Tepotzlán (1930), a study preceded by an embryonic research study of the Mexicans of Chicago funded by the Local Community Research Committee. For a few months, Halbwachs was materially very close to these developments, but he remained at a great intellectual distance from them, resolutely looking in another direction, collecting statistical data on American family budgets as he would have done on French or German ones in Paris or Berlin and calculating the relative speeds of immigrant group integration, while remaining deaf to what the most original and amusing Chicago sociologists were suggesting he do: plunge into the life of social groups.

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