

RELIGION AND REVOLUTION IN DURKHEIM AND SOREL

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Introduction

At the beginning of this paper it is perhaps appropriate to mention to the reader that fate has handed me down a crooked deal in the form of an historical play in which the two main characters refuse to talk to each other. Because a play consisting mainly of monologues and asides could be extremely boring, I have decided to spice it up with what I believe are plausible dialogues.

The first, and foremost, personage of our drama is, of course, Emile Durkheim or rather, more specifically, the Durkheim of the *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* [EFRL]. Now, I see the EFRL as a book for all seasons. This is well justified because, after all, Durkheim's most important objective in the book was «comprendre la nature religieuse de l'homme, c'est à dire à révéler un aspect essentiel et permanent de l'humanité» (Durkheim 1960: 2) [«clarifying the religious nature of man, that is to say, of revealing an essential and permanent aspect of humanity», Durkheim 1975: 102].

If what really concerns Durkheim is modern man, then, the text, dealing with the most primitive religion of mankind, is

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crying out loud to be applied to modern times. This is far from being a revolutionary innovation in the reading of the EFRL; indeed, much of the inspiration for my endeavour stems from Jeffrey Alexander (1988)'s collection and, generally speaking, from Norbert Bellah's studies on civil religion (Bellah 1970).

In the conclusion to the EFRL Durkheim remarks that all societies, if they want to survive, must maintain its unity and specific characteristics, and that the way to do that is by periodical gatherings in which individuals come together and through ceremonies and rituals strongly reassert their common sentiments. It is irrelevant whether the assembly celebrates a strictly religious belief or an important event in the life of the nation (Durkheim 1960: 610). This statement, we might say, tells us how societies keep together, how social order and solidarity is maintained.

The problem with *le lieu et le moment* which constituted Durkheim's social milieu was that, in his view and that of many of his contemporaries, it lacked moral fibre; it was a period of malaise and mediocrity. Durkheim, however, was confident that «un jour viendra où nos sociétés connaîtront à nouveau des heures d'effervescence créatrice (...) au cours desquelles de nouveaux idéaux surgiront, pendant un temp qui serviront de guide à l'humanité» (Durkheim 1960: 611) [«the day will come when our societies will know once again hours of creative effervescence in which new ideals will be born and new formulac will emerge which will for a time serve as a guide to humanity», Durkheim 1975: 157]. This statement provides a framework for the explanation of how societies change.

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to introduce the second personage of my historical play, and this is no other than the enigmatic and much-maligned figure of Georges Sorel, ingénieur de profession and jack of all ideological trades. My main purpose in this paper is to elicit the common ground between Durkheim's EFRL and Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*. This may seem a rather tall order or chimeric enterprise because no

two texts could apparently be more dissimilar than Sorel's *Réflexions sur la violence* (1906/1908) and Durkheim's *Les Formes élémentaire de la vie religieuse* (1912). Sorel's book unashamedly presents itself as a political tract aimed at creating a new proletarian morality centred on the idea of revolutionary violence; the avowed objective of the text is to annihilate the mediocre and decadent bourgeois society that surrounds him, and in the same motion create a rejuvenated, socialist society. Durkheim's book, it is well known, focuses essentially on the religion of the most primitive of societies - the Australian Aborigines.

What I shall maintain in this paper is that, if there is a common guiding thread through *Reflections* and the *Elementary Forms* or, even more generally, between the political projects of Sorel and Durkheim is their moral concern. In fact, what characterises and gives unity to the work of both men is the search for a new morality. This is a point which, in the case, of Durkheim needs no belabouring; as to Sorel, his life-long ideological meanderings from catholicism to marxism, from marxism to syndicalism, from syndicalism to nationalism, from nationalism to profascism and from the latter to leninism, hide, among other things, a constant search for new ethical principles that can change the morally corrupt and declining bourgeois society in which he was forced to live.

Hans Joas (1993: 23) has remarked that there exist affinities between Sorel and Durkheim, but they can only be found if one places both authors in the proper intellectual scene of turn of the century France. And this means, among other things, to be prepared to accept that Sorel and Durkheim drew at times from the same philosophical sources.

A final introductory proviso. This paper will mainly concentrate on Sorel for the very simple reason that the pertinent sources of Durkheimian ideas are mostly found in the EFRL, Book II, Chapter 7 and Conclusions. Both sections have been extensively quoted and analysed in the Durkheimian tradition

(Pickering 1984) and it would perhaps be repetitive to dwell too much on them.

Sorel and Durkheim: an overview

Peter Nijhoff (1985: 263-64) has suggested that there are convergences and divergences between the works of Sorel and Durkheim. According to him it is possible to periodise these relationships in four major stages:

1) **1894-1895**. There is an attempt by both authors to reject a morality based on an individualist philosophy and to reconstruct morality on the basis of social life. It is what Durkheim calls to treat the facts of moral life from a scientific perspective, while Sorel also emphasises that ethical ideas have social origins.

There is, however, a difference in method. Durkheim favours a rational reconstruction on the basis of technical progress. As he put it: «Not only does the division of labour exhibit that character by which we define morality, but it increasingly tends to become the essential condition for social solidarity» (Durkheim 1984: 332). Under the joint influence of W. James and H. Bergson it is possible to observe that Sorel takes a line based on what could be called 'pragmatic activism'.

2) **1895-1900**. Both Durkheim and Sorel express a concern for the 'moral malaise' which is typical of the **fin de siècle**. It is not just a matter of highlighting the moral problem of modernity, which for many thinkers is a chronic problem. There is an urgency about this moral malaise. Implicit in that attitude is a critique of all kind of mechanical and deterministic conceptions of human ideas. What we see in both authors is that they accord a «growing significance to the relative autonomy of mental constructions» (Nijhoff

1985: 263). In *Suicide* Durkheim refers to the fact that social life consists of **representations**; Sorel refers also to **representations**, that is, collective moral sentiments. Socialist ethics is the result of the progressive organisation of the socialist movement. Later on the key word for Sorel will be 'myth'.

3) **1900-1908**. This stage could be superficially described as one of antagonism between Durkheim and Sorel. It is a period in which sociology is institutionalised by Durkheim; the discipline also becomes more politicised. There follows a more unitary and doctrinaire conception of sociology. Sorel denounces sociologists as 'professionals of a secular cult'. He rejects the idea of a sociological school (and the Durkheimian School in particular), and favours a more diverse and independent approach.

However, during this period there is a progressive spiritualisation of the social question in Durkheim. He places successively his hopes in industrial development, the development of professional corporations and education. As to Sorel, his faith in revolutionary syndicalism is no obstacle for a commitment to the role of ideas and emotions as motors of history.

4) **1908-1914**. In this period Durkheim pursues his evolutionary tendency towards giving prominent attention to the social function of religion. This culminates in the publication of EFRS in 1912.

Sorel, for his part, discovers new reasons for thinking that certitude emanates from both religious experience and scientific experimentation, but believes that these two activities cannot take place inside the centralised and hierarchical structures of, respectively, the Church and the University. What is required is an asceticism which is only found among those who have withdrawn from the official world.

Sorel and his intellectual milieu

Sorel is much more open than Durkheim in admitting intellectual influences in his work. The idea of myth as an instinctive unconscious process is central to Sorel's work, and in particular to his *Reflections on Violence*. The sources of this concept can be traced back to a variety of authors: Vico's **ricorsi**, Bergson's *élan vital*, Le Bon's crowd psychology, Tarde's imitation, etc. As we shall see in more detail later, all attempts to pin down Durkheim's concept of effervescence to the influence of Le Bon, and generally of the so called crowd psychology, have been spurned. As to Bergsonian influences, the issue has been hardly touched upon. Last but not least, one could raise the issue of Sorel's possible influence on Durkheim. However, as I said in the Introduction, my aim is more modest: to detect parallellisms between Sorel and Durkheim and to explore their common intellectual sources.

Although Sorel has often been presented as a Marxist (at least a *sui generis* Marxist), there are many differences between Marxism and Sorelism. One which is particularly relevant to our endeavours is the role of religion and morality. While Marx and Engels tended to see these concepts in epiphenomenal terms, Sorel believed that they had to be treated as important categories of social life. What is stake here is that Sorel asserts the centrality of human will; the idea that it is conscious human action that changes society. His socialism is hence much more voluntaristic than that of Marx.

It was in the context of labouring on the issue of working class consciousness that Sorel developed the idea of revolutionary images as myths. Myths, which were to be carefully distinguished from utopias (or intellectual constructions), were conceived as «the expressions of a will to act on reality so as to change it» (Portis 1980: 57). For the proletariat the myth of modern times was the general strike. And the vision of a goal towards which the proletariat was working was the revolution.

In a nutshell, Sorel described the general strike as «the myth within which all of socialism is contained; that is, it involves a complex of images capable of naturally evoking all the feelings which are raised in the struggle of the socialist movement against contemporary society» (ibid: 46).

Sorel became interested in Marx at the same time that he became interested in Vico, and it would be fair to say that Sorel looked at Marx through Vichian eyes. Sorel long study on Vico was published in *Le Devenir Social* in 1896. At a general level, Sorel emphasises two key Vichian ideas: «History has to be understood as the history of human ideas and history has to be seen as the history of human creation (hence the centrality of ethics)» (Jennings 1983: 330)

As a result of Vico's influence, Sorel tended to envisage Marx's law of the collapse of capitalism in metaphysical terms, that is, as social poetry, as social myth. Although Sorel's idea of myth stems from a long tradition (which most probably includes Durkheim), his most immediate and relevant source is Vico. For Vico myth is a «source of non-rational human motivation» (Jennings 1985: 122).

This myth as a form of consciousness is typical of the primitive beginnings, that is, what Vico calls ideal history. According to Vico, in the rudimentary forms of society, that is, among savages and barbarians, there is no solution of continuity between the past (a domain in which affectivity dominates) and the future (a domain in which activity dominates). «Myth, which is a fragment of human history transfigured by primitive thought, transforms itself naturally into a representation of the future, that is, into a mobilising image» (Juillard 1990: VII). What Sorel borrowed from Vico was a description of the «psychological evolution of the human intellect and, in particular, from the idea that at the beginning of this evolution man thought instinctively and practically, not rationally» (Jennings 1985: 122).

Jennings remarks that, at this early stage in Sorel's intellectual evolution, there is no influence of Bergson, but that by the

time Sorel came to write *Reflections* (1906) Bergsonian notions were superimposed on Sorel's Vichian concept of myth (ibid). Another important influence of Vico on Sorel was the reassessment of the role of religious beliefs in society. As a consequence of it, Sorel came to accept the social legitimacy of religion. It no longer made sense to him whether religion was true or false; the important matter was that religious beliefs were the result of deep-seated convictions (Jennings 1983: 335).

Vico's famous cyclical theory of decline and rebirth (ricorsi) could provide an adequate explanation for the continued existence of Christianity. However, what mattered most to Sorel were the characteristics of early Christianity - a period in which religion was quasi-instinctive because the early Christians thought in terms of myths (austerity, heroism, revolt, etc). «All qualities ascribed to early Christianity were subsequently attributed by Sorel to the merging syndicalist movement» (Jennings 1983: 337).

To sum up. Sorel is critical of Marx's conviction that «religion must disappear in the face of science (...) Religion always find elements of rejuvenation in the mystical» (ibid: 336). At a wider level, it is obvious that what Sorel rejects in Marx, and specially in his followers, is economic determinism. To explain ideas and sentiments one must refer to the psychological evolution of society; to how the ideas of duty, conscience and reason evolve. As a revolutionary syndicalist Sorel will say with Vico that a ricorso can only take place «when the popular soul returns to a primitive state, when everything is instinctive, creative, poetic» (Sorel 1905: 273). In this context, it is possible to say that strikes engender sentiments of fraternity, of union, of heroism; they represent the victory of the instinctive over bourgeois intellectualism (Jennings 1983: 340).

I have mentioned in passing that by the time Sorel came to write *Reflections* the influence of Bergson was quite visible. Neither Sorel nor Bergson made a secret out of that, and although Bergson never endorsed Sorel's politics he admitted

that Sorel was a good interpreter of his work, and that he also admired him intellectually. As Horowitz has put it: «Both were responding to a cultural milieu, and both did a great deal to shape the specifics of this milieu while drawing sustenance from each other» (Horowitz 1961: 43).

Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889) [*Time and Free Will*] was an important influence on a Sorel who was concerned with mobilising the working class. The point was how to convince men to change the world. In the myth of the general strike he found a source of energy which would maintain the tension against the established, bourgeois order, and in the final resort would contribute to its downfall.

In 1907 Bergson published *L'évolution créatrice* [*Creative Evolution*] in which he «postulated the existence of an all-pervading élan vital (vital impulse) that carries life, by more and more complex forms, to higher and higher destinies» (Jennings 1983: 139). Sorel applied Bergson's ideas to human activity, to the purposes of groups.

The Bergsonian concept of intuition was seen by Sorel as relevant to the description of the modern socialist movement, although he rejected Bergson's attempts to use biology to explain social facts. On the other hand, Sorel saw sympathetically the Bergsonian idea of religious (or rather spiritual) renaissance, and his rejection of rationalism and scientism.

For Sorel, following Bergson, «both religion and revolutionary myths occupy the profounder region of our mental life» (Nye 1973: 428). Sorel envisaged the «apotheosis of the general strike as a moral purification of the world, as an end in itself; this typifies his chialistic (millennarian) attitude» (Sonn 1989: 271). It would be inappropriate, however, to extract the wrong conclusions from these statements; in spite of the analogies between religion and socialism (and particularly of the symbolic force of both Christianity and religion), Sorel suggests that each has unique psychological characteristics (Sorel 1990: 84-5).

Perhaps it would be useful to illustrate Sorel's subtle position concerning the comparison between religion and socialism. Pareto said somewhere that Sorel was a believer, at least for a while, in the divinity of the proletariat. Sorel had observed that both early Christianity and the French Revolution had «derived their dynamic force from myths that aroused in their adherents a self-sacrificing enthusiasm capable of transcending the ordinary difficulties standing in the way of cooperation among individuals, so Sorel thought that the myth of the general strike might offer the proletariat a similar basis for a common inspiration and purpose arising from needs already manifested among the workers themselves. By giving to these needs an epic character, Sorel believed that the syndicalist myth with its militant conception of a violent class war might very well engender qualities of personal responsibility and personal significance» (Humphrey 1951: 209). As I said above, for Sorel it may not be valid to trace socialism and religion back to the same psychological forces, but the evolution of both movements produces similar effects in society, and hence makes the comparison interesting.

Bouglé coined the term Bergsonian syndicalism to refer to the impact of Bergson's doctrines on Sorel and his colleagues during the first decade of this century. Paramount among Bergson's ideas in this context is his reject of intellectualism. In the able hands of the Bergsonian syndicalists the concept of *élan vital* transforms itself into the concept of *élan ouvrier*. As pragmatists of sorts, they give primacy to action. It is interesting to mention in passing, that the «Jamesian impact came at a late stage in Sorel's life» (Horowitz 1961: 43). His book *L'utilité du pragmatisme* (1921) can be seen as «a statement of staunch support for James at the expense of Bergson» (ibid).

According to Bouglé it is plain that Sorel preaches the separation of the working class from the rest of society as a means to enhance class authenticity; only in this way can the working class give rise to a new morality. As we know, myth is the

precondition for the existence of action; but a myth is «not a description of things but an expression of will». Bouglé, of course, points out that Sorel never asks the question of how society will be reorganised; only the creation of heroism matters (Bouglé 1909: 412).

The Bergsonian element is also present in Sorel's call to the synthesis of dynamic images. As he put it: «strikes have created in the proletariat the most noble and dynamic sentiments. The general strike has a unifying effect and increases the intensity of the group; it also rememorates the most telling images. What is obtained is an instantaneous intuition of socialism that language could not offer in a clear way. This is the equivalent of the perfect knowledge of Bergsonian philosophy» (Bouglé: 413).

Bouglé concludes that the weakness of Sorel's perspective is that a society is not a factory and that the new society cannot be constituted by an assemblage of factories. In a critique to one of Sorel's colleagues - Lagardelle - Durkheim had insisted that classes cannot be cut off from the national milieu. What is, then, missing in Sorel is a proper sociological perspective. However, one of the merits of the Bergsonian syndicalists is that they have emphasised the importance of morality, purity and freedom, and these are essential characteristics in any socialist movement (Ibid: 415).

In addition to Vico and Bergson, Sorel also took an early interest in Le Bon, which he kept for the rest of his life. A correspondence between the two authors took place over approximately twenty years (*Cahiers de L'Herne*, 1986, 53). In spite of the ideological differences Le Bon was always opposed to socialism), they both appreciated each other's work; in 1901 Le Bon's considered Sorel as the «most erudite of French socialists», while Sorel referred to Le Bon, in 1911, as «the greatest psychologist that we have in France» (Sand 1986: 166-7).

In 1895 Sorel reviewed Le Bon's *La psychologie des foules* (1895) for *Le Devenir social*. Although Sorel found in the book interesting information and ingenious remarks, the review is

rather short and critical of crowd psychology, and in particular of Le Bon's equating crowds to nations, sects, social classes, etc. Furthermore, Sorel doubted the degree of scientificity that could be attached to categories such as suggestion, contagion, etc, which constituted Le Bon's main explanatory conceptual arsenal (Sand 1986: 167-8).

A few years later, in a review of Le Bon's *La psychologie du socialisme* (1898), Sorel (1899) agreed that socialism was essentially a mental state, and that a parallelism could be established between the history of socialism and the history of Christianity. Le Bon insisted in «the notion of socialism as a religious phenomenon, appealing to the affective, dreamlike and chimerical qualities of human nature» (Nye 1973: 427).

By the time Sorel was writing *Reflections*, that is, 1905-1906, his attitude towards Le Bon was much more positive, even concerning concerning Le Bon's idea of the spontaneity of the masses. Although it is perhaps still true that his idea of myth owes more to Vico and Bergson than to Le Bon, it is plain that Le Bon's idées images inspired Sorel's definition of the myth as «an organisation of images capable of evoking instinctively all sentiments that correspond to the different manifestations of the war of socialism against modern society» (Sand 1986: 171). Furthermore, Le Bon insisted in the idea that images have to be taken as a whole, that is, they cannot be broken into their component parts; a point that Sorel shared concerning myths. As he put it: «C'est l'ensemble du mythe qui importe seul» (1972:152) [«It is myth in its entirety which is alone important» (1972: 126)].

It could be said that there is still quite a conceptual gap between Le Bon and Sorel; after all, if Le Bon's main focus is the crowd, Sorel's main interest is class confrontation. Although both collective groups are characterised by irrational states of conscience, classes and crowds are very different; in the former members preserve their individuality, while in the latter they are dissolved in the mass. Certain psychological mechanisms of

crowd behaviour (hatred, revenge, jealousy), are not appropriate to characterise classes which are meant to exhibit class consciousness (Sand 1986: 171-2). On the other hand, after 1908 Sorel seems to agree with Croce that socialism is dead. There follows the so called nationalist period of Sorel in which he sustains that the only reservoirs of moral force are the nation and tradition.

Sorel and the concept of social myth

We can now bring together the different strands that converge in Sorel's *Reflections*. Sorel is interested in the nature of symbolic images and their effect on political action. His main contribution to this field is to have pointed out that human behaviour is far from being rational; that a number of spontaneous and emotive elements are part and parcel of political motivation.

If we focus on his idea of myth he defines it «as an emotionally charged artificial construct, which though perhaps inaccurate or absurd, reaches people at a deeply conscious level and inspires them to action! (Gross 1982: 104). This author, in a remarkable article, provides us with a number of key points concerning Sorel's treatment of myth (Gross 1982):

First, «myths cannot be cognitively understood, because they operate in some prereflexive area of the mind where intuitions and beliefs are also stimulated» (104)

Second, «myths are frequently objectifications of the convictions of a group, that is, an expression, in the form of images, of the goals and aspirations of an entire collectivity» (104).

Third, «myths are too amorphous and volatile to be subjected to scientific study» (104).

Fourth, «myths are neither true nor false, nor can they be separated in its component parts. Only the consequences of a myth can reveal its validity» (105).

Fifth, «myths, as action-images, cannot be refuted; the power of a myth (or a belief) rests on faith, which is not open to rational analysis» (105).

Sixth, «it is because they are undemonstrable that myths have such a powerful appeal for the masses. People want and need to believe: myths seize the imagination with great force and provoke emotions and qualities of sacrifice and struggle which allow for heroic deeds» (105).

Seventh, «myths tap a vital part of the psyche which would be otherwise unactivated» (105).

Eighth, «myths are not lies, propaganda or ideology in the modern sense of these words. They are not cynically manufactured either. Myths are already present, in a latent form, within the mass itself. They are already anchored in the collective unconscious (Jung)» (105).

When assessing the validity of myths, Sorel believed that they were only effective if they encouraged morality, action and creativity. Myths are conveyed by means of symbols which appeal to the imagination and emotions. For Sorel, symbols are the objectification of a myth, that is, a word or a thing representing something else. Symbols are forms of expressing a mythical content. The only symbols that Sorel discusses are the spoken words; in his work there is no reference to signs, emblems, posters, etc. Speech is essential for the man of action because it is evocative, inspiring and stirs up emotions. In *Reflections*, Sorel mentions as examples of valid myths the following historical examples: homeric myths and heroism, Christianity's Second Coming and moral progress, the French Revolution and the will to victory and, in modern times, the proletariat's myth of the general strike (Gross: 108).

Durkheim EFRL II.7 & Conclusion: effervescence and social psychology. The shadow of Le Bon.

I shall start this section with a controversial quote from Svend Arnulf (1939). Referring to the EFRL, he quotes from the conclusion the well-known passage in which Durkheim says:

«The day will come when our societies will know again hours of creative effervescence, in the course of which new ideals will be born and new formulae emerge which will for a time serve as guide to humanity» (FEVR 1960: 710; Pickering 1975: 157).

Durkheim is nowhere explicit as to which institutional forms will effect the salvation, and Ranulf asks rhetorically:»is not the rise of fascism an event which, in due logic, Durkheim ought to have welcomed as that salvation from individualism for which he had been trying rather gropingly to prepare the way?» (Ranulf 1939: 31).

This comment could be easily dismissed suggesting that it reflects the musings of a disgruntled, unemployed Scandinavian sociologist. However, what is fascinating is that in the article Ranulf refers to, and quotes from, two letters that Marcel Mauss had addressed to him. In the first letter (November 1936) Mauss writes as follows:

«Durkheim and I were the founders of the theory of the authority of the représentation collective. That great modern societies, which had more or less emerged from the Middle Ages, could be subject to suggestion as Australians are by their dances, and made to turn around like children in a ring, is something that we had not really foreseen. We did not put our minds to this return to primitivism. We were satisfied with a few alusions to the state of the crowds, when something quite different was at stake» (Gane 1992: 214).

In another letter (May 1939), Mauss concludes:

«I think that all this is a real tragedy for us, an unwelcome verification of the things we had been suggesting and the proof that we should perhaps have expected this verification in the bad case rather than a verification in the good» (Gane 1992: 214-5).

In the light of these texts by Durkheim and Mauss, it is perhaps pertinent to ask: what was the meaning of the future effervescence that Durkheim had in mind?. We know what Arnulf had to say. Mauss' letters are highly ambiguous, suggesting, on the one hand that, that the Durkheimian School had discovered in collective effervescence an important social mechanism, but, on the other hand, that this could be put to rather obnoxious use by modern totalitarian states.

Another Durkheimian, Bouglé, writing in the late nineteenth thirties, interprets Durkheim's reference to the future in a rather different, perhaps more positive way. He suggests that when Durkheim refers to a rejuvenating faith he is thinking essentially of socialism. And that, like Sorel, he presents socialism as a faith, and not as a science (Bouglé 1938: 34-5).

Since Sorel's name has cropped up in Bouglé's text, it is perhaps of some interest to find out what did Mauss think about Sorel and about the relationship between Sorel and Durkheim. Writing in 1925 Mauss showed sympathy for some of the characteristics of the Russian Revolution; in particular the soviets (as a professional organisation in which property and political functions were vested upon) correspond to the moral, political and economic conclusions that Durkheim had reached in *La division du travail social* and other texts. In a somewhat cavalier fashion Mauss attributes the affinity between Durkheim's theory and Soviet praxis to the role of George Sorel, who having borrowed these ideas from Durkheim, then influenced Lenin (Mauss 1925). Quite a farfetched genealogy!

Ten years later, in 1936, and with the hindsight of fascist regimes in existence, Mauss's attitude towards Bolshevism has changed and tends to see strong affinities between communism and fascism - the latter tyranny deriving from the former. In a letter to Elie Halévy he wrote the following:

«The basic doctrine from which all of this is deduced is that of the *minorités agissantes* (active minorities) as it was called in Parisian anarcho-syndicalist circles, and particularly as it was developed by Sorel (...) The same doctrine of the minority, of violence and the same corporatism, have spread in my lifetime from Sorel to Lenin and Mussolini. All three recognise it. Let me add that Sorel's corporatism was halfway between that of Pouget and that of Durkheim, and eventually came for Sorel to correspond to a reactionary view of the past of our societies» (Mauss 1983:2) (Gane 1992: 213).

If anything, this quote puts a lot of weight on the impact of Sorel's doctrines, but with the rather curious and implicit objective of handing a compliment to Durkheim as the originator of the corporatist doctrines. Sorel is obviously the fall man, taking the blame for the emergence of the tyrannies of the twentieth century. Durkheim is left in the background, with his honour intact.

The same Machiavellian role in relation to the origins of modern totalitarianism has been attributed to the work of Le Bon. Hence, it is time to turn now to Le Bon and Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence. There is enough evidence to suggest that Durkheim, in his lifetime, insisted in distancing himself from Le Bon's sociological approach, denying him any scientificity. In spite of this negative attitude, the international sociological establishment accepted Le Bon as a *bone fide* sociologist (or at least social psychologist) and his theories were discussed in most history of sociology textbooks until well-entered the 1950s.

Le Bon was taken seriously by a variety of scholars: Freud, Weber, MacDougall, Adorno, Michels, Sorokin, etc.

Part of the problem, of course, has to do with the problematic relations between sociology and psychology in the Durkheimian School. Daniel Essertier wrote in 1927 that «crowd phenomena play a preponderant role in Durkheim's EFRL; by a singular turn of events, books such as those of Dr. Le Bon, which in fact were subjected to criticism by Durkheim when he treated psychological explanation in sociology, explicitly or implicitly carry authority in the Durkheimian School» (Essertier 1927: 11). According to Essertier, this vulgar psychology which Durkheim had rightly rejected made a return in the EFRL.

In 1927 Marcel Mauss, reviewing Barnes's et al *The History of the Social Sciences*, complained that Kimball Young had created a sociological category in which Durkheim, Le Bon and Sighele were placed together. The idea of an «intensive collective psychology» to which Durkheim would belong he found it «extremely abusive» (Mauss 1969: 285). In recent times both Lukes (1973) and Pickering (1984) have been critical of any attempts to insinuate that Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence was influenced by crowd psychology in general and Le Bon in particular.

Lukes is somewhat ambiguous in his presentation of the case. On the one hand, he admits that «Durkheim was doubtless affected by the crop of studies in crowd psychology» (1973: 462), but he adds that «there is no evidence that he was specifically influenced by any of them» (ibid.). And the reasons, in so far as Le Bon is concerned, are that «Durkheim would have been the last person to regard Le Bon as a serious social scientist» (ibid).

Pickering (1984) dedicates two chapters (21st and 22nd) to the topic of effervescent assembly, but it is in chapter 22nd that he focuses on the issue of crowd psychology. It is not easy to summarise his argument, which is detailed and complex, but he concludes that «Durkheim does not see collective effervescence

primarily, if indeed at all, in terms of crowd psychology» (1984: 402). In fact, neither Lukes nor Pickering engage in a detail analysis of Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules*, so we are left with the problem of comparing Durkheim with the ghost of Le Bon.

We have established that in the context of Durkheim's treatment of collective effervescence he never refers to the work of Le Bon. Both Lukes and Pickering refer to the only footnote in the EFRL (Durkheim 1960:300 which can throw some light on the influence of crowd psychology on Durkheim's work. The reference is to a book by Otto Stoll entitled *Suggestion und Hypnotismus in der Völkerpsychologie*. Durkheim quotes from the second edition of 1904 (the first edition was in 1894). Now, who was Otto Stoll?. We know that he was a medical doctor by training and a Professor of Geography and Ethnology at the University Of Zürich. His area of ethnographic expertise was Central America. In addition to technical ethnographic books, in 1908 he published a more popular book entitled *Das Geschlechtsleben in der Völkerpsychologie* (which roughly translates as *Sexual Life of the Savages*).

His *Suggestion und Hypnotismus in der Völkerpsychologie* was meant as a sort of manual; it is essentially a descriptive text (both historically and ethnographically oriented), with very little analysis. The second edition was reviewed by Marcel Mauss in *L'Année Sociologique* (1903-4). Mauss **compte rendu** is generally positive, emphasising «la nature suggestive de la religion et l'influence suggestive de ses représentations» (1903-4: 234). Perhaps the most interesting thing in Mauss' review is the reference to a book by Friedmann entitled *Über Wahnideen in Völkerleben* [*Hallucination in Primitive Society*] (1901). This text is perhaps the missing link in the crowd psychology saga of Durkheim. In it the author presents, according to Mauss, the idea that «the excitation psychologique of the masses is in fact the most powerful moment of social life in general and of religious life in particular» (1903-4: 234).

Perhaps it does not matter so much whether Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence originated from crowd psychology or not. The crucial issue which seems to be at stake is the relationship between the social sciences and psychology. Durkheimians have always been reluctant to incorporate psychological explanations into their theoretical framework. It is against the Rules! On the other hand, a sociologist like Raymond Aron, when looking at the EFRL said that the phenomena of «effervescence are the very paradigm of that psychological and social process in which religions are born» (Aron 1967: 355). That it is possible to read EFRL II.7. in the light of a theory which takes on board psychological and sociological elements we have the example of Moscovici's *La Machine à faire des dieux* (1989).

Conclusion

This paper has no obvious conclusion, because whether we refer to Sorel or to Le Bon there can never be a convincing answer to the question: to which extent was Durkheim influenced by them? And the simple reason is that in the EFRL Durkheim does not cite them. So, what is the point of the whole exercise? Essentially, to recover the richness and complexity of the turn of the century social scientific (and in a wider sense intellectual) scene. Both Sorel and Le Bon played an important part in it; if we lose them, our inheritance, our sociological capital (to use Bourdieu's expression) is diminished. And this has also an impact on our contemporary, current sociological endeavours. If in addition to that it can help to clarify or enlighten certain aspects of Durkheim's work, all the better.

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ABSTRACT

Through a comparison of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, the paper explores the convergences and divergences between these two very different authors. What characterises and gives unity to the work of both men is the search for a new morality. This can only be ascertained when Durkheim and Sorel are placed in the wider political and intellectual framework of turn of the century France. The reason for these parallelisms stem from the fact that both authors shared a good number of philosophical sources.

RESUM

Mitjancant una comparació de les *Formes Elementals de la Vida Religiosa* de Durkheim i les *Reflexions sobre la Violència* de Sorel, aquest article analitza les convergències i divergències entre aquests dos autors tan diferents. Allò que caracteritza i dona unitat a l'obra de Durkheim i Sorel és la recerca d'una nova moralitat. Això només ho podem veure quan els situem dins del marc polític i intel·lectual de la França de finals de segle. Aquests paral·lelismes s'expliquen pel fet que ambdós autors compartien un bon nombre de fonts filosòfiques.