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The Review

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The review intends to focus on the issues of anthropology and contemporary philosophy in order to face the classical and modern questions in the social, political and cultural context of our post-global era in which the *grands récits* are hidden but all the more present and operating.

Since we are convinced that the meaning of life coincides with intensive research intended as a joyful experimentation, even in those fields in which any kind of change and actually any kind of experimentation seem to be out of the question, and, being more than ever aware that the heritage connected to the *grands récits* should be removed from our discourses, the review selected the term *Dada* to indicate a position of structural opening toward the choice of research methods and the use of language in order to avoid the dogmatic of protocols. This long way has already been undertaken by many scholars such as Paul Feyerabend for instance, and we warmly invite you to join us and proceed with resolution and irony.

In this context, the contributions can be published in one of the languages of the European Union, according to the wish of the authors, after reviewing by native-speaking colleagues. Multilingual reading seems to be spreading in the academic circles of the Continent and this partially allows avoiding translations in *lingua franca* and their inescapable limitations. The authors are free to adopt their own style concerning footnotes and bibliographical references as far as they remain coherent with their own criteria.

The review also has the scope to publish the contributions of young scholars in order to introduce them to the national and international debate on the themes in question.

The Editor
Antonio L. Palmisano

DADA

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a cura di

Antonio L. Palmisano

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Emile Durkheim and the Northern Irish violence Anthropological insights upon James Dingley' *The IRA* and *Durkheim* and *National Identity in Ireland*

Marcello Mollica

Abstract

This paper is about a detached reading of James Dingley's understanding of some Durkheimian paradigms and the way they have been applied to explain the ongoing *Troubles* in Northern Ireland. I would agree with the general argument of Dingley's books as anthropologically sound, although representing a classical and empirical tradition that post-modernists may disagree with and, by implication, Irish Nationalists, especially Republicans. The conspicuous conventional and unconventional challenges posed by the books, both within and without the academic realm, and the controversies that have arisen in the turbulent post-conflict phase of Northern Irish politics among scholars working there have long intersected my own ethnography.

Keywords: Emile Durkheim, James Dingley, Irish revisionism, Northern Ireland, the *Troubles*

Introduction

Both James Dingley's books, *The IRA* (2012) and *Durkheim and National Identity in Ireland* (2015) should be of value to anyone interested in Emile Durkheim and even more if willing to apply Durkheimian analysis to modern social issues. The books should also interest anyone willing to study the Isle of Ireland as well as terrorism and violence in general. However, the Durkheimian dimension is obvious in the latter book but it is indeed more implicit in *The IRA*.

Also of note is Dingley's application of Ernest Gellner's (1983 and 1994) (strongly Durkheimian) analysis of modern nationalism and Isaiah Berlin's (1993 and

2001) defence of the Enlightenment tradition against modern Romantic ideas of ethnic nationalism. Both these authors feature strongly in Dingley's bibliography, and are clearly used to support his main Durkheimian insights, which often come close to an almost Marxist analysis. This latter point is particularly interesting, since the 1969/70 split in the IRA was between the Official's (Marxist) and Provisional's (anti-Marxist) (Holland and McDonald 1994; English 2004). The Official's (who became the Workers Party) wanted to call off their terrorist campaign as sectarian and contrary to working class unity and interests. In other words, Dingley's Durkheimian analysis would broadly fit in with a Marxist one! This should make Dingley's work of real interest to anyone on the 'Left' as much as to anyone with a security interest.

However, this is by definition an academic enterprise well beyond the historiographical component as it goes without saying that Durkheim lived in XIX and early XX century France and probably never thought about Northern Ireland as a case study. Further, he probably did not think that his theory would be applied to explaining the violence that has torn Northern Ireland in a bloody civil war for decades and whose shadow is still there.

Both books particularly interest me since as an Italian (and Catholic *by implication*) I have lived and worked in Northern Ireland, conducting my own anthropological field research there for half a dozen years, living in both Catholic and Protestant urban enclaves while also working and teaching in a number of Northern Irish academic *loci*.

Revisionism

First of all, one must be aware of the 'revisionist debate' in contemporary Irish studies, to which James Dingley devotes a whole chapter in *Durkheim and National Identity in Ireland* (2015). Revisionists emphasise an historical objectivity and the importance of a 'scientific' approach, attracting many Marxists as well as traditional British/Unionist non-Marxist supporters. Republicans see this as an attack on Irish Republicanism and biased against Republicans. Republicans emphasise the subjective and emotional aspect of Irish history, its tragedy, suffering and oppression (assumed rather than critically evaluated as the revisionists do) (Boyce and O'Day 1996; Brady 1994).

The debates and disputes often become quite heated and Republican attacks on revisionists are frequently vitriolic. This should not surprise people, to attack Republicanism is to attack the legitimacy of the modern Irish state founded after the IRA campaign of 1919-23. Indeed, much recent revisionist history has cast doubt on the validity of that campaign, its methods and motivations, which is then used to highlight the Irish Republic's sometimes ambiguous position in relation to the modern IRA in Northern Ireland.

This is important since the nature of any Durkheimian analysis upon which James Dingley builds his analytical framework is bound to be revisionist, given Durkheim's empiricism and scientific emphasis and attachment to Enlightenment values (again, like Marx). Consequently, Dingley's work is also clearly revisionist and relies almost exclusively on revisionist references, however, the size and depth of such a body of literature in modern academic studies of Ireland, rather strengthens his argument than weakens it. But such an emphasis on revisionist literature may be seen as biased by Republicans since it tends (tacitly) to ignore, or (implicitly) attack, the traditional Republican narrative. On the other hand, revisionism tends to hold the academic high ground because of its empiricist and scientific rigour and rejection of emotional appeals and sentiment.

In a way this highlights a wider important point: what does count as objective and unbiased? In contemporary post-modern/critical theory there is a tendency to see all arguments and traditions as equal, and therefore one should not make any value judgement about them or be selective in preferring one over another. For them, this stands for unbiased work. But for the Enlightenment tradition (by implication Irish revisionism) it is the pursuit of objective data and scientific analysis of it alone that counts as objective. Dingley, rather obviously, falls into the latter category in a rather old fashioned way. This especially when writing (*the IRA*) for a publisher like Praeger, with its primary audience in the security field. But security has a need (literally life or death at times) for a much more empirically oriented analysis.

Dingley's work has accompanied me in my field-work encounters all around Northern Ireland's conflictual *loci* and above all in its ethno-religious enclaves. Both his books show extensive research and familiarity with the literature and both find empirical support in Dingley's main urban research setting, the city of Belfast. Nevertheless, both books as well as much of Dingley's work have never been easy to digest for many of my academic colleagues on both sides of the border because they are simply 'unusual' in that they attempt to analyse Irish affairs from a disciplined theoretical perspective, although less obviously in *The IRA* (2012).

In *The IRA* (2012) Dingley develops Durkheim's idea of moral communities to examine how Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants define each other in opposed ways and are able to justify sectarian acts against the other. This is particularly true for the IRA who are almost wholly Catholic and targeted primarily those who do not conform to idealised (Republican) Irish Catholic types (as in Hart's, 1999 analysis). It also helps explain how the Catholic Church often found itself competing with Republicans for influence in Catholic communities. Here Republicans often set the pace in terms of setting local community and political agendas, with the Church often lagging behind in terms of popular support and sympathy. The Church – James Dingley refers especially to its hierarchy – was quite ambivalent about Republicans, who although fellow Catholics now began to challenge the Church for leadership of Catholic communities.

Despite the conspicuous attacks both books received (see for instance Ó Beacháin, 2014), they genuinely describe how life is experienced by people living in the Isle of Ireland. However, many academics who have attacked Dingley as too one-sided academics also tend to show a lack of detachment in their own work, because they are incapable of separating their academic objectivity from their personal life. (A common problem in the academic realm in conflict and post-conflict scenarios when academics are part of that realm they attempt to analyse.) The scientific contribution of Dingley's work lies indeed in something else.

In his analysis Dingley draws particularly upon such revisionist works as Peter Hart's *The IRA and Its Enemies in Cork* (1999) and *The IRA at War 1916-23* (2003) and other regional studies of IRA activity in 1919-25. The reality is that full studies of this campaign are rare and much of the records held by the Irish Government are locked away. However, recent follow up studies, such as *The Year of Disappearances* (2011) by Gerard Murphy (a Cork Catholic and journalist) strongly suggest that Hart's analysis was correct in its de-mythologising and painting a far from romantic image of the IRA of 1919. Also, other regional studies of the IRA support Hart, such as Sinead Joy's study (2005) of *the IRA in Kerry, 1916-1921*, Fergus Campbell' *Land and Revolution, Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921* (2005) or Tom Garvin's *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland* (2005).

Dingley then links this up to the Romantic Movement in Europe, itself another rare feature in that it tries to avoid Irish exceptionalism and place it in a wider, pan-European context. He argues that Romanticism appealed to the kind of socio-economic profile of IRA men and in this follows very much in line with Isaiah Berlin (2001) and his analysis of Romanticism. This socio-economic profile links with modern studies that show that terrorists are rarely mentally ill or psychologically unstable, e.g. Lyons and Harbison's (1986) study, showing how most terrorists were quite normal and well adjusted, but ordinary murderers usually were unstable with major social and psychological problems. Such an analysis makes both anthropological and structural-functional analysis sense (hence also political) a much better one than the normal psychological ones.

Like all revisionists Dingley is strong on the de-mythologising, particularly Republican ideas of Irish oppression by the British. As he indicates technically Ireland was no more oppressed than England, Scotland or Wales, in addition, not only Protestants but many Catholics in Ireland felt no sense of oppression in 1914 (when World War One prevented Ireland from slipping into civil war over Home Rule as against maintaining the Union). That most Catholics supported Home Rule (although not independence) and almost all Protestants wanted to retain the Union is true. This would suggest that ideas of an emotional sense of (Catholic) oppression at the inability to realise a Catholic society in an overwhelming Protestant United Kingdom is more accurate reflection of reality. This, rather than that an empirically real, or

objective, oppression existed (Catholics had gained the vote on the same basis as Protestants 1829).

Here the Oxford Chair of Irish History Roy Foster's *Vivid Faces* (2015) produces valuable support. He analyses the background of many of the leaders of Irish Nationalism and Republicanism before and after World War One and finds that most of them far from being politically oppressed were as free as anyone else and at liberty to express their views. However, Foster does observe the often thinly supressed homo-eroticism of many (in Victorian Britain which banned homosexualism) or their poetic natures and sensibilities or Romantic yearnings, stifled in Victorian conformity. This suggests that personal, emotional feelings of oppression of a socio-psychology nature, were stronger influences. This of course would be highly toxic venom to any Republican, for whom there is no other explanation for Republican violence than British oppression. The resort to violence in 1919 almost demands a justification of resisting violent oppression, whether it existed or not, to legitimise it.

However, this would once more fit in with a broader pan-European perspective, both historically and socially – (Martha Crenshaw's *Terrorism in Context* (1995), would provide broad support here). Terrorism had been a feature of European life from the mid-19th century on and well into the 20th century, especially related to national causes that often had a religious core. It was an act of nationalist terrorism that started the First World War. Of course this would once more place such an analysis in a context Republicans would find hostile.

But, this is indeed where the Durkheimian analysis is so relevant: first, understanding a socio-economic context. Next, one moral (Catholic) community being dominated by another larger (Protestant) one, that imposed its values (even if democratically) as part of an United Kingdom could 'feel' oppressive to the minority unable to realise its own in the public sphere. But this calls down a 'scientific' analysis of morality and the use of violence and the only book I know to address this subject (Timothy Shanahan, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism,* 2009) found that the modern IRA failed almost totally to justify itself in moral philosophy terms. Unfortunately James Dingley does not develop this as he could do. But given that he was writing for an established 'security' publisher, with an eye to that market, he may have felt constrained.

Multiculturalism critics

Another area where some readers may note a definite security bias is in Dingley's reference to IRA killings as murder, whilst security (Crown as he refers to them) killings are not. This would certainly offend multi-culturalists and Republicans, since it does not treat all deaths as legally and morally equal. This does reflect a (some

might argue pedantic) legalism, whereby because the IRA were an illegal (terrorist as defined in law) organisation all their killings were illegal (hence murder). Dingley applies this to historical as much as contemporary IRA activities and it is an arguable distinction. However, it fits in with a Durkheimian approach which would objectify acts. At the same time, via a moral community perspective, it helps explain how the IRA could see its own (objectified) 'murders' as (subjectively) legitimate and the same as Crown forces killings. The IRA, in its own subjective interpretation of the situation saw itself as 'at war' something national and international law did not, making their killings legally and objectively murder, a not unreasonable distinction in the security field.

This is where the potential of a Durkheimian analysis (or any theoretically disciplined analysis that distinguishes between objective and subjective) comes into its own in explaining such things as terrorism. This particularly relates to the idea of clashing moral communities, each challenging the legitimacy of the other as the correct moral order able to legitimise legal definitions, e.g. of what constitutes murder. This helps explain why Dingley's, or any revisionist, analysis could be construed as an attack on Irish Republicanism: one is applying the moral legitimacy of the objectively existing legal system of the dominant moral community, in this case the UK, Unionists and Protestants, to judge the other's, i.e. IRA, Republicans and Catholics acts. And here one would have to begin making judgements about which one is the more valid, at least under the circumstances of the existing situation.

Any reading of the history of science in Ireland would show that it was almost wholly a Protestant and British, i.e. Unionist interest. Irish Republicans, overwhelmingly Catholics, were committed to an ideal that opposed most of the canons of modernity just as the Catholic Church opposed modernity and unification in Italy. This comes out more clearly in *Durkheim and National Identity in Ireland* (2015). It also fits in with the Romantic tradition that dominated nationalist politics throughout Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, where violence was often romanticised and legitimated.

It is the largely historical analysis of the development of the IRA and Republican militancy that dominates the first half of *The IRA* (2012) and will be of most interest to both Anthropology of Violence and Anthropology of Religion. It suggests more than is actually told in Durkheimian terms and also supports a lot of Marxist analysis. The second half of the book is a more detailed analysis of the organisation, tactics and operations of the modern IRA (in effect mostly the Provisional IRA) from 1969 onward. And whilst the book relies much on already published works it also has some useful insights obviously gleaned (explicitly so in places) from close connections to the security forces (after all James Dingley is indeed a former NATO instructor on terrorism).

Yet even in Dingley's analysis of the internal workings of the IRA their clear religious dimensions, and those of the 'troubles' become clear, both in terms of

targets and recruits. This again suggests the relevance of a Durkheimian analysis, although it is not fully developed as such. One aspect of this that is particularly worth mentioning was in the targets chosen by the IRA, rarely of military significance, but often of great symbolic value – very Durkheimian, indeed. Only in the later phases of the campaign (after 1990) did the IRA begin to realise that economic targets alone led to real political pressure, such as bombings in London.

Meanwhile, the fact that Republicans rarely made any attempt to reach out to their fellow Protestant co-inhabitants or try to understand them is highly significant. The lessons to be learnt here could still have great significance for understanding any religious based terrorism. No one doubts that Irish Republicanism is about Catholicism, just as Loyalism is about Protestantism.

Political Potential of Anthropology

The conflation of religion with national identity and the use of it to legitimise political violence is a major lesson one can learn from most studies of nationalism. Equally, the obvious failure of Irish Protestants and Catholics to formulate a common national identity would not be new for any historian or student of nationalism, especially one grounded in the anthropology of religion. But anthropology was not the only thrust of this book, a security orientated analysis was too, but it is fascinating to see the potential for such an analysis, not just for anthropology but for informing political policy. Indeed, Durkheim did directly inform French Government policy throughout much of his academic life, being sponsored by the IIIrd Republic as it tried to overcome France's deep ethnic and religious divisions.

The anthropological potential is much more fully developed in *Durkheim and National Identity in Ireland* (2015), although Dingley is a political sociologist. Here the Durkheimian perspective (Durkheim is indeed also an anthropologist) is spelt out in full, especially his anthropology of religion and his sociology of knowledge.

Dingley begins by examining how much nationalism influenced Durkheim's sociology, an important but neglected factor in itself, and then examines how sociology became a tool for national formation, or in France's case re-formation. Here the importance of moral (national) community is also strong, specifically the idea of Mechanical versus Organic (solidarity) community, the former based around traditional religion the latter around modern science and division of labour (clearly indicating a 'revisionist' perspective).

From this Dingley traces the emergence of two distinct economies in Ireland (almost Marxist) and argues how this in turn helped form two opposed moral communities built upon opposed economic interests. These interests in turn were symbolically represented in religion, i.e. Catholic (Southern, rural peasant-proprietor economy) versus Protestant (Northern, industrial economy). Again, comparisons here

with the unification of Italy (which Dingley does not make) are most illuminating; here a modernising, industrialising unification Italy was at almost constant war with the Vatican in the 19th century. In particular, Italian unification was driven by a modernising, industrialising and secularising North against a 'backward' and devotedly Catholic South of Italy, provide a fascinating parallel.

Most economic historians would accept that two distinct economies emerged in Ireland, so Dingley builds on solid ground. He certainly also has a firm grasp of Durkheimain theory, especiallythe different nature of Organic versus Mechanical solidarity and moral community and their implications. The questions that therefore arise are simply how accurate and realistic is Durkheim in his theoretical analysis of the differences between Organic and Mechanical, how well do they fit Ireland and how good a job does Dingley do in using Durkheim to explain Ireland.

Once again, one comes back to the revisionist debate. Given Durkheim's empiricism, this would imply the partition of Ireland in 1921 reflected a real division in Ireland and not just a British imposed one to retain a neo-colonial hold over Ireland (the traditional Republican view that asserts the whole of Ireland is one natural nation). Hence, for a Republican, anything that suggested a real, objective division in Ireland other than British oppression and Imperialism, would be automatically ruled out as biased against them. By implication, this makes any Durkheimian analysis anti-Republican. And Dingley is definitely a Durkheimian (although ironically it leads him to concede a reality to Irish Republican separatism from the United Kingdom in the non-industrial South, based on a peasant-proprietor economy, i.e. objective economic relations determined national identity).

One has to read this book from the discipline of a Durkheimian perspective and not from a necessarily pre-conceived idea of whether the Isle of Ireland should, or not, be united. Seen from a purely Durkheimian perspective James Dingley makes a convincing case for Durkheim providing a high level of explanation for the partition of Ireland and the failure of the Catholic minority to feel at home (hence feel oppressed) in Northern Ireland. The importance of such an analysis, rare in itself in Ireland and beyond, is that it asks one to suspend moral or emotive judgement for some kind of objective and scientific assessment that may not be morally or emotionally satisfying.

It is also important to realise that such an analysis does not set out to quantify, justify or critique any abuses of power that a majority (Protestant) may have had over a minority (Catholic). The conflict in Northern Ireland is often presented in terms of Catholics revolting against Protestant discrimination against them in terms of jobs, housing and the distribution of resources. This is an hotly topic, e.g. how much or how deliberate or how much it related to demographic and structural differences between the two communities (few would argue that there was none, it is how much and why that is contested. Thus whilst Republicans point to Protestants dominating senior public sector appointments, Protestants point to Catholic attempts to boycott

the state in Northern Ireland). However, the more fundamental and less often asked question is: why should Catholics and Protestants want to discriminate against each other and form separate identities? The answer is what a Durkheimian analysis sets out to do, not justify or quantify injustices but to seek out their underlying cause.

Dingley also does well to provide a good synopsis chapter on the theory of nationalism from which to test the relevancy of Durkheim's social theory to nationalism in general and Ireland in particular. And as long as one can accept the Durkheimian analysis it does help explain quite concisely the problems defying a united Ireland (or Northern Ireland) i.e. in Durkheimian terms there simply isn't one. There were two opposed economies that formed separate social relations and moral communities, and British Imperialism has nothing to do with it. In this sense Durkheim would provide substantial evidence to support Protestant Unionists (if not their methods, it at least makes them explicable) in Northern Ireland. Irish nationalists and Republicans would find it highly objectionable and biased against them. Partly this would be because the 'scientific' conclusions were opposed to their desired outcomes and partly because science (Durkheim's methodology) itself is seen as British and Unionist (see, Bowler and Whyte, *Science and Society in Ireland, 1800-1950*, 1997).

This latter point Dingley develops well in two chapters, one on the revisionist debate and the other on the history of science and the arts in Ireland. Here Dingley traces their distinct trajectories as cultural aspects of Unionism and Nationalism. Not unsurprisingly, for an industrial economy, Protestant Ulster was dominated by a scientific culture and morality, rural Catholic Southern Ireland by an arts and humanities culture and morality. This by no means implies that all Protestant-Unionists are enlightened scientists, the fact that large sections of them can support 'creationism' and that their Loyalist terrorist groups were just as bad as the IRA indicate this. But in Durkheimian terms alone, their core values at a high cultural level that only dimly resonated amongst industrial workers and maybe not at all amongst other Protestant sections were what was important.

The same could be said for many Catholics. Indeed, around the world how many of a modern electorate really know and understand key issues of nation formation? Dingley could have drawn this aspect out much more clearly, as it is he tends to leave the analysis at a rather simplistic level of union = good, Irish Nationalism = bad, in Enlightenment terms. Even if his intent was merely to highlight what divides and why, it is still a real criticism that he did not draw this out more clearly since it could be misread, especially since he accepts the 'real' legitimate basis for a separate Irish Republic.

At the same time Dingley does develop the functional structural aspects of Durkheim. He shows how Ulster's industry not only developed the new kinds of industrial relations ('organic') required of an industrial division of labour. Also, how these also developed into extended industrial and trading relations with the rest of the

UK and the international trading world. Of course the Southern economy developed almost wholly opposed structural dynamics that equate with a 'mechanical solidarity', well-illustrated in Samuel Clark's historical study of the transformation of rural Catholic Ireland in the 19th century (*Social Origins of the Irish Land War,* 1979).

Conclusions

One does not have to agree with either Emile Durkheim, or James Dingley's interpretation and use of him to see how valuable insights may be gained into nationalism in general, the kind of ethno-religious conflicts that have plagued Europe in the 20 the century, and Ireland in particular. Few writers get it all right. One needs to read these books together, *The IRA* (2012) after *Durkheim and National Identity in Ireland* (2015) to get the full flavour of the relevance of Durkheim.

The question is, does Durkheim provide insights that are genuinely useful, even if one does not wholly agree with him. To traditional Republicans Durkheim is probably biased against them, because of his empirical method, i.e. he is scientific. But from an anthropological perspective both books are useful and add important dimensions to our ability to analyse complex socio-political problems. They show how useful classical social theory may still be in understanding often quite old problems still waiting for resolution (often because they arose in the 19th century and were key references for classical social theory). A more critical analysis of Durkheim would have been useful, but that may not have been Dingley's main purpose, which appears to have been to state the relevance of a Durkheimian analysis.

Dingley writes well and as long as one understands social theory he is easy to follow. He uses a wide range of references and sources, inevitably weighted to the revisionist side. His strong dismissal of traditional Republican arguments and sources will offend Republicans, post modernists and critical theorists, but will please revisionists and traditional social scientists. Perhaps greater reference to and analysis of traditional Republican arguments would have helped set the scene better and given his work greater impact, especially explaining how and why Durkheim critiques traditional narratives.

But having stated that: both books point to interesting new insights into the relevance of classical social theory to contemporary political and anthropological problems. They draw on an eclectic range of cross-disciplinary sources and draw on knowledge obviously gleaned from security sources that may not be available to all researchers.

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