

## FRENCH ETHNOLOGY AND THE DURKHEIMIAN BREAKTHROUGH

The ever-growing number of critical assessments (and, indeed, often refutations) of Durkheim's social theory<sup>1</sup> - particularly his interpretation of ethnological data relative to archaic law, the prohibition of incest, kinship systems, types of social cohesion, totemism and, more generally, religion - confirms implicitly the challenge it still represents to students of non-industrial societies. These assessments, however justified they may be in discarding some Durkheimian tenets as premature or erroneous problem-solving devices, tend to minimise the historical contribution he made to the reconstruction of social anthropology in France. The purpose of this note is to give a brief account of how it was achieved. After some introductory remarks on the state of contemporary ethnological research, I will discuss the channels through which its issues penetrated Durkheim's thought and came to inform the core of his intellectual project. This will help to survey the strategic practicalities by which the Durkheimian group secured academic respectability and usefulness for an utterly marginal extra-mural pursuit. Finally there will be an attempt to appraise the overall impact of the Durkheimian epistemological revolution upon the future of an essentially empirical discipline that, by its very nature, broke the canons of scholarship established in 19th-century France.

Ethnology, to be sure, was by no means a Durkheimian invention. Intellectual curiosity about the non-Western world had been tapped and canalized since the early 19th century through various institutional initiatives, some not quite ephemeral though always non-academic. Gentlemen scholars under William Edwards organised in Paris a *Société ethnographique* between 1839 and 1847 which served as a model for the London Ethnological Society

(founded in 1842). Another similarly mundane gathering (created by learned *gens du monde* in 1859) survived and later gave birth to a *Société des Américanistes* in 1895. The *Société asiatique*, though only marginally dedicated to ethnology proper, dates back to 1822 and so does the very popular *Société géographique*, a major instance of patronage and publicity for exploration overseas. More importantly the mid-century scientific movement, headed by Broca, Quatrefages, Hamy and Verneau, that rose to international fame as the *École anthropologique* (endowed with a chair in the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* since 1855 and with a semi-official teaching provision under the aegis of the Paris Faculty of Medicine since 1875), was engaged from its inception in ethnographic theorizing and research. It sponsored the first public lectures (by Letourneau) dedicated to primitive civilisations. It was also instrumental in founding what later became the *Musée de l'Homme* (in 1880). Incidentally some members of the French colonial staff (missionaries, officers, administrators, surgeons) also became involved (mostly through personal interest) in empirical inquiries in what was by the end of the century the second largest colonial empire. In 1898 the colonial government in Hanoi funded the first French overseas research centre, the *Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*.

None of these initiatives succeeded in ensuring a minimal scholarly standing for a would-be ethnological discipline in France, both for intellectual and institutional reasons. None of them produced a coherent paradigm to account for the available evidence concerning archaic societies. Research in the field remained purely descriptive and usually ignored problems of interpretation, while armchair explorers (Letourneau, though lacking Herbert Spencer's stature, being a notorious case in point) were comfortably feeding their second-hand findings into evolutionary schemes. No corpus of certified knowledge emerged out of these efforts in the form of a consensus on the scope, methods or privileged topics of the speciality which could confer at least a nominal intellectual identity shared by a group of practitioners. Had it been necessary, such scholarly weaknesses would have militated against academic integration. In fact this proved to be a largely foregone conclusion given the extraordinary functional rigidity (limited to teacher training) and thematic narrowness (reserved for classical studies) of the post-Napoleonic university system.<sup>2</sup> Thus the conditions for growth and scientific upgrading of French ethnographic research continued to be poor at the turn of the century, resulting in low productivity, a blurred public image and a mediocre visibility at home and abroad. In a representative survey of ethnological literature before the Great War Steinmetz cites only 14% of items in French as against 45% in German and 31% in English.<sup>3</sup> The topical references in the *Encyclopédie française*<sup>4</sup> comprise, as late as 1936, only 28% of French titles as against 41% of English titles. Qualitative backwardness and lack of intellectual organisation of early French ethnography was matched by the paucity of its output.

In these circumstances it is understandable that Durkheim's

attitude to the use of ethnographic data was at best ambiguous when, in the late 1880s, he embarked upon the elaboration of his social theory. Before the first issue of the *Année sociologique* in 1898 none of his individual works tackled specific problems of archaic societies and even less of those societies studied by his fellow-countrymen. Nevertheless he could not fail to recognise major statements about social evolution going back to 'the Primitives' (such as Westermarck's history of marriage)<sup>5</sup> or ignore the very Parisian Group of anthropologists and ethnographers in his report on contemporary French social science.<sup>6</sup> He also had to bring a (rather limited) range of ethnological evidence in line to demonstrate in his doctoral dissertation (1893) the working of 'mechanical solidarity' by contrast with its 'organic' counterpart that allegedly marked the 'organisation of superior societies' to which (as its sub-title suggests) his first major essay was dedicated.

Durkheim's interest in ethnology was at that stage genuine but heavily distrustful. He often expressed suspicion about the technical reliability of ethnographic information and stressed, more significantly, the preference historical data should be granted in sociological comparisons, since only relatively developed (that is 'historical') societies had achieved the measure of 'crystallization' of customs reflected in their legal system that made them 'objectively' comparable.<sup>7</sup> And yet his effort to ground the new social science on thoroughly documented hard-core evidence - as supplied by history, demography and social statistics - proved to be off-set from the start by the very presuppositions underlying his theoretical project. This aimed, above all, at understanding the conditions of *social cohesion* that rested upon historically variable but inter-dependent *social functions* (like collective representations, economy, kinship) and most particularly upon mechanisms of social control or discipline (like morals, law and religion). The method to be used had to be comparative and genetic, as 'complex' or more developed social phenomena could be analysed only by confrontation with their 'simpler' or less developed counterparts.<sup>8</sup> The latter were mostly known through ethnographic evidence. The need for the intensive exploitation of ethnographic data was thus an in-built element of the original Durkheimian project.

Nevertheless the theoretical foundation of this need, though often explicitly stated, remained, if not shaky, utterly ambivalent. On the one hand, apparently, this methodological precept 'points backwards to the pervasive evolutionism of the nineteenth century' which 'Durkheim never really shed... with his talk of "origins", "prototypes" and "stages"',<sup>9</sup> claiming surreptitiously both ontological simplicity and historical anteriority for the 'primitives' (a crucially handy word of double meaning).<sup>10</sup> The identification of simple cultures with early civilisations conformed not only with the idea of unilinear evolution but also with Durkheim's anthropology based on the unitary conception of the human mind. On the other hand, however, the head of the French School of sociology frequently took pains to explain that if

evolution were indeed a useful working hypothesis, it could by no means be regarded - as Comte had done - as unilinear.<sup>11</sup> One should not admit that 'all inferior peoples... represent a definite stage of our historical development. There are certainly some to which particular circumstances gave, at least at some point of their evolution, a direction different from the one we have followed.'<sup>12</sup> This is a recognition of the truly historic character of archaic societies<sup>13</sup> and also potentially attaches a question mark to their 'simplicity'.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever these doubts, uncertainties and reservations may have been, the shift of Durkheim's research focus on the problem of religion in the mid-1890s gave a new lease of life to his involvement with ethnology. Immediately after the completion of his book *Suicide* published in 1897 - which can be considered as the final statement in his 'pre-ethnographic period'<sup>15</sup> - he became absorbed in the study of documents and interpretations of archaic religious phenomena along lines set mostly by contemporary British 'religious anthropologists' (Lang, Marett, Frazer, Müller and above all Robertson Smith). His published work, culminating in the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), was henceforth dominated by this subject-matter, from which the largest section of his authoritative journal the *Année sociologique* (12 issues between 1898 and 1913) drew its substance. In the meantime some of the best scholars gathering around Durkheim (Mauss, Hubert, Hertz and others) specialised in the criticism of ethnographic knowledge proper, of which the *Année* soon became by far the most powerful vehicle in France.<sup>16</sup>

Some pretended to explain away Durkheim's 'discovery' of the problem of primitive religion purely on the basis of his relevant readings which, in the early years of the century, included the illuminating recent studies on totemism in Australia and in America by Spencer and Gillen, Strehlow, Howitt, Boas, Swanton etc. The availability of detailed information, which for the first time seemed to be of high quality, on what he came to consider the simplest and possibly the earliest form of worship, was obviously a necessary condition. Three sets of less accidental factors appear to be even more decisive. First of all the sociology of religion as such responded to an essential demand in the French ideological market-place of the period marked by the struggle between the Catholic Right and the Republican establishment and leading up to the conclusion of the Dreyfus Affair and the Separation of Church and State. The indirect approach Durkheim attempted when refusing to study the contemporary scene was liable to bring supplementary rewards on that score. It helped him to keep the benefits of a neutral and purely scientific criticism but also to identify religion with a universal and indeed basic social 'function' which, necessary as it proved to be, could and did sometimes take a contingent or even 'monstrous' historical shape.<sup>17</sup> Finally the study of primitive cults promised an unprecedented epistemological yield in the understanding of how societies preserved their integrity and, more particularly, how the human mind (related to 'collective consciousness') was working. Primitive religion seemed for Durkheim not only simple but also

in a way the common denominator for most of the other 'social functions' - at least on the plane of binding collective representations like law, symbolic culture, morals, cosmology, techniques etc. At one point it was regarded by the Durkheimians as the fundamental principle of social identity as well as the key to the categories of thought (time, space, classifications). Hence recourse to ethnographic evidence became a vital issue for the completion of the work undertaken by the *Année* group, but soon it also became invested with new hopes as to the future progress of social science in general.

Besides its above-mentioned topical efficiency in the sociology of religion, the broadening of ethnological information opened up new vistas in comparative sociology at large. Compared with the rigid and limited supply of historical and contemporary statistical data available on Western-type societies, the lore of archaic civilizations, based on direct observation, appeared to be extensible and renewable at will. Whatever might have been the intrinsic difficulties in interpreting such observations - which Durkheim's contemporaries grossly under-estimated - they offered the illusion of being sufficient if not complete, thus allowing experimental case-studies on small-scale societies which would have been inoperative on modern, complex, large-scale societies.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, paradoxically enough, the study of the 'Primitives' helped to by-pass some of the disciplinary snags - like learned journalism - in which most would-be sociologists of the time got entangled:<sup>19</sup> the cultural distance from the object of study removed some of the obstacles to a scientific posture and its ideological or political irrelevance helped the Durkheimian scholars to arrive at generalisations about the nature of society free from the temptation to be bogged down in issues of contemporary interest only. This 'detour' was all the more welcome in that, by their position within the contemporary ideological field, most Durkheimians belonged to and were active in the Socialist or Radical Left and, more importantly, were lacking the technical tools (e.g. survey methods) and perhaps even the analytical instruments (e.g. concepts of social stratification) to achieve explorations of their immediate social environment with the same degree of theoretical relevance as they did in connection with the 'Primitives'. Lastly, ethnology, an institutionally marginal and intellectually 'weak' discipline, lent itself much more easily to sociological exploitation than the better-established classic specialities - like history or geography - which possessed the means of self-defence in the form of authoritative canons of erudition and powerful organs of publicity. The Durkheimian thrust meant for the former unexpected re-evaluation; for the latter, the menace of a competitive partnership. This is why Durkheimian social theory, even if contested, soon came to dominate French ethnology while it was received with distrust and scepticism in most if not all other spheres of academicism. In this respect, Durkheimian sociology can be considered as the 'theoretical investment' of an unoccupied disciplinary domain - that of the available knowledge concerning archaic societies -

following the principle of least resistance.

Ethnological interest as such did not by itself involve for the *Année* group any specific tie with the French branch of the discipline. On the contrary, references to field-work in the French overseas territories were much rarer, both in the table of contents of the *Année* and in the original essays of its collaborators, than in recent publications by Anglo-Saxon and German anthropologists. Far from feeding nationalist complacency, they tended to stress and deplore the backward state of the art in France.<sup>20</sup> Hardly any field-worker made contributions to the *Année* under Durkheim, probably because few came up to its standards of scholarship. However the Durkheimians' ethnological focus had an immediate impact on the course of development of the discipline. Discussions in the *Année*, on the strength of the specialised competence they displayed, raised at a stroke the scientific status of French ethnology close to the international level, since the Durkheimian cluster became a privileged debating partner of some of the major British, German and Dutch scholars in the field. Inside France matters of ethnological relevance penetrated some of the dominant forums of intellectual exchange. Durkheim exposed his theory of totemism at the *Société de philosophie*, and such prominent figures of contemporary philosophy as Lévy-Bruhl or Bergson became engaged in topical discussions.<sup>21</sup> Manifestly, through the Durkheimian thrust, the problem of archaic societies left the narrow disciplinary ghetto to which it had hitherto been confined. This happened all the more in that, for the first time, some academically well-established scholars (*agrégés*, staff members of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*) came close to ethnographic field-work or collaborated with field-workers.<sup>22</sup> Though for compelling institutional reasons no real conjunction of field ethnology and academic scholarship was feasible at that time,<sup>23</sup> the public image of the discipline and the implicit idea about its intellectual profitability underwent a radical change for the better when academics embarked upon the exegesis of its information - as had been done earlier only with regard to the vestiges of classical high culture.

The investment by Durkheim's disciples of the few available positions in French higher education (Mauss, Hubert, Hertz) earmarked for or admitting ethnological scholarship, proved of course the major strategic act in the process of the up-grading and academic legitimization of what had until then been an extra-mural speciality. The deliberate character of the achievement can be demonstrated in Mauss's most unusual career.<sup>24</sup> Important as they were, the new courses at the *Ecole Pratique* did not in themselves usher in a period of real prosperity and growth for French ethnology. Ethnology, for one thing, was not even mentioned in their titles. Viewed more as a consecration of Durkheimian sociology of religion than of an empirical discipline, these courses, though attracting a fairly large audience,<sup>25</sup> remained utterly disconnected from university degrees conducive to intellectual professions. They lacked any backing by specialised research careers in particular and they had no organic link with

empirical scholarly undertakings. But the grass-roots work they accomplished in inculcating in a new, though not professionally motivated, academic clientèle the most advanced knowledge within reach on some aspects of archaic cultures, initiated a cumulative process that appears clearly as the indispensable condition of the institutional establishment of ethnology in the university system that took place after the First World War.

By that time the master of the Sociological School had died (1917), like many of his companions (among them Hertz, Beuchat and Hubert); and the remaining aged members of the *Année* group, exempt from the uncontested intellectual hegemony of Durkheim - the integrating principle of the cluster - were left to the pursuit of their specialised curiosities. This state of affairs implied among other things the chance for some, like Mauss, to loosen the doctrinal ties that attached his work to Durkheimian social theory at its crudest without losing the hallmark of its scientific legitimacy. Not only Mauss's post-war work, crowned by the *Essay on Gift* (1925), drew notably upon or was indeed made possible by this liberated relationship with the founder, his uncle, and its sociological orthodoxy. The ethnological discipline proper found itself set free from an overwhelming theoretical patronage that had tended to hinder its autonomous development by reducing it to an auxiliary role while promoting it powerfully as a major 'special' branch of the integrated social science. A non-exclusive reference to Durkheim and to the demand his work implied for the extension of the knowledge about archaic societies<sup>26</sup> represented the intellectual background leading to the foundation of the *Institut d'ethnographie* of the University of Paris (1925). Though the *Institut*, headed by Mauss, Lévy-Bruhl and Rivet (a physical anthropologist) was by no means a Durkheimian, let alone a formally social anthropological, undertaking,<sup>27</sup> through Mauss's teaching it has in practice become best known as the breeding ground of the new, empirically-biased French ethnological school.

This is not the place to assess the *Institut's* achievement. Still, one might attempt to summarize the overall Durkheimian contribution to what made its success possible as the academic practice of a scholarship and the training of scholars alien to all that had been hitherto regarded as part of the compulsory value-system of French universities. Such recapitulation can be briefly done under three headings - when keeping in mind that ethnology in a French Faculty of Letters represents a more radical innovation than the earlier introduction of sociology, human geography, psychology and educational science which, in one way or another, were all derivations of classical disciplines established in the 19th century.

First of all Durkheimian social theory was instrumental in the reappraisal of the significance, as an object of science, of archaic societies considered as a definitely *low cultural object*, 19th-century scholarship had been resolutely ethno-centric and elitist, concentrating exclusively on 'high' civilisations and in general on objects endowed with a noble cultural status due

to a long historical process of consecration. Scholarship indeed was meant to be part of this process. It was intended to be exploratory and interpretative as well as celebrational, a condition ethnology could by no means satisfy. Secondly, and more importantly, the Durkheimian epistemological revolution helped to reassess the contribution that knowledge about the Primitives could make to the development of history, social philosophy and, obviously, sociology proper. This essential character of auxiliary science was in a way objectified in the organisation of the curriculum at the *Institut d'ethnologie* when the degree granted by the *Institut* became an optional component of the graduate degree in philosophy and later in sociology. The insights such reassessment contained are still currently referred to and made use of in social history, social psychology, historical demography etc. Lastly, the work of Durkheim and his disciples initiated a radical change of attitude to empirical observation of socio-cultural reality - whether first-hand or second-hand - as opposed to the study of written documents. To be sure, none of the Durkheimians did any field study in the narrow sense.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless Durkheim's and Halbwachs' multi-variate analyses of statistical data banks on suicide, working-class budgets etc., Mauss's brotherly collaboration with Beuchat or Hertz's field trips to gather folkloristic data took a share in the re-evaluation of empiricism that was being staged in the academic scene in common with the new human sciences (especially with regional geography and experimental psychology). Mauss's personal achievement completed the rehabilitation of empirical ethnology. Under his guidance<sup>29</sup> field research became a professional obligation for would-be ethnologists in France, and the new academic discipline shook off the last encumbrances of the humanistic tradition of the 19th century without losing its theoretical scope. Thus various lines of scattered field ethnologists could rejoin a platform for specific problem-solving at the highest level of theoretical relevance where they encountered potential armchair scholars, pushed to the empirical substantiation of their models. In this and other respects the Durkheimian ancestry, mostly openly claimed, or tacitly admitted, adds a distinctive mark even nowadays to French social anthropological practice as it is exemplified in the work of Lévi-Strauss, Dumont or Bourdieu.<sup>30</sup>

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NOTES

1. Detailed inventories of recent studies on Durkheim and his followers can be found in two issues of the *Revue française de sociologie* edited by Philippe Besnard. See vol.XVII no. 2 (1976), ('A propos de Durkheim'), and vol.XX no. 1 (1979), ('les Durkheimiens'). A partial translation of the latter will be published in English by Cambridge University Press (forthcoming).
2. On this point see my essay, 'Le problème de la légitimité dans l'organisation historique de l'ethnologie en France' in *Revue française de sociologie*, vol. XX no. 1 (1982) (forthcoming).
3. Cf. S.R. Steinmetz, *Essai d'une bibliographie systématique de l'ethnologie jusqu'à l'année 1911*.
4. Paris 1936, tome 7, pp. 7. B - 2-6.
5. Review presented in 1895. Cf. E. Durkheim, *Textes*, vol. I, Paris; Editions de Minuit 1975, pp.70-92.
6. Cf. 'Lo stato attuale degli studi sociologici in Francia' (1895), *ibid.*, pp. 76-81.
7. See for example the following passage in the review on Westermarck (1895): 'The insufficiency of informations provided by ethnographers is acknowledged by the author himself. Indeed among peoples which we know only through them law exists only in the form of custom. Now it is particularly difficult to apprehend a collective practice when it has not yet become conscious of itself and found expression in fixed formulas....How to distinguish the legal fact when law has not been consolidated, from the casual fact it rules. Thus one has been induced into transforming isolated anecdotes into legal rules.' (*ibid.*, p. 72)
8. Cf. *Règles de la méthode sociologique* [1893], Paris 1947, p. 137: 'One can explain a social fact of some complexity only on condition of integrally following its development through all social species. Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology, it is sociology proper....First one constitutes the most rudimentary type that has ever existed, in order to follow afterwards step by step the way in which it has progressively gained complexity.'
9. Cf. Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study*, London; Allen Lane 1973, p. 456.
10. Cf. *ibid.*
11. Cf. his inaugural lecture at the Bordeaux Faculty of Letters (in 1888) in E. Durkheim, *La science sociale et l'action*, Paris; Presses Universitaires de France 1970, p. 89. Durkheim stated that Comte was misled, when proposing his Law of the Three Stages of human evolution, by 'the imperfections of the ethnographic sciences of his time....But today it is manifestly impossible to support the idea that there is one human evolution

everywhere identical to itself and that all societies are varieties of one and the same type.... Mankind ... is more like a huge family, the different branches of which - more and more divergent as they are from one another - get detached from the common stock and go on living their own life. Besides, who can prove that this common stock has ever existed?'

12. Cf. 'Ethnographie et sociologie' (1904) in *Textes*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

13. See a more explicit statement on this issue: 'Inferior societies, as humble as they may be, were not born yesterday. All have a history. Some of them had already entered into decadence when they were observed for the first time. How could we know what is primitive and what is not, what is a survival of the past and what is due, on the contrary, to a more or less recent regression?' Cf. *Textes*, vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 73 (review on Westermarck [1895]).

14. Mauss, who was often entitled to give an authorized and qualified wording of his uncle's views, happened to be at his most ambiguous when dealing with the alleged simplicity of archaic cultures. His inaugural lecture at the Ecole Pratique (in 1902) was a stunning show of theoretical tightrope walking: 'I have just told you that these facts were interesting because "simple and "easy to know". But I must prove it. Religious phenomena, illustrated by the societies about which I have just spoken, are precisely reputed to be neither "simple" nor "easy to know".... Religious phenomena which we observe at present in Australia for example are certainly neither simple nor primitive. Australian and American societies have behind them a long history.... But in the same time it is obvious that, in spite of their developed character, these facts bear also the mark of simplicity that can make us suppose that, in certain respects, they represent very early and very rudimentary matters.' Cf. M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, vol. I, Paris: Editions de Minuit 1968, pp. 489-490. In his uncompleted doctoral thesis on *Prayer* (1909) his formulation of the problem was more outright: 'But when we make derive what is superior from what is inferior, we do not intend by any means to explain complex phenomena by the simple ones. For the most rudimentary forms are to no extent more simple than the most developed forms. Their complexity is only of a different nature. Those elements which in the course of evolution will develop and will be distinguished, are united here in a state of mutual inter-penetration.' (*ibid.*, p. 396)

15. See Steven Lukes, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

16. About 25% of all reviews in the *Année* dealt with problems of ethnography and folklore proper, while another 20% were dedicated to studies on ancient classical or oriental civilizations. Thus on the whole the journal was largely centered on topics lying outside the modern Western world.

17. Cf. Durkheim's qualification of the Catholic Church as 'a monster from a sociological viewpoint' on account of its author-

itarian organisation and moral monolithism. See 'Débat sur les conséquences religieuses de la Séparation de l'Eglise et de l'Etat', in *Textes* vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

18. Mauss's 'Seasonal variations of the Eskimos' can be regarded as a most accomplished example of such case-studies.

19. In particular the direct competitors of the Sociological School, the scholars gathered in the *Institut international de sociologie* under René Worms, the Le Playist cluster or the Catholic sociologists.

20. See Mauss's alarming report 'L'ethnographie en France et à l'étranger' (1913) in *Oeuvres*, vol. III, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-434.

21. Lévy-Bruhl's conversion to ethnology is a most conspicuous case in point. He was already an established full professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne when his research interests, obviously under Durkheimian influence, shifted to problems of 'primitive mentality'. Most of his later work since *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910) was dedicated to ethnological theory. He became one of the founding fathers of the *Institut d'ethnologie de l'Université de Paris* (1925).

22. Mauss closely collaborated with the polar explorer Beuchat. Hertz himself accomplished field-work on French folklore.

23. These reasons include, among others, the absence of institutionalised research careers, the scarcity of research funding and the functional exclusivity of the universities, which strongly resisted the admission of new disciplines, especially those that lay outside the classical branches of study also taught in the State *lycées*.

24. Contrary to expectations Mauss did not apply for admission to the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, a normal academic track for *lycée* graduates of his class. He did not even seek graduation in Paris, in order to follow his uncle to Bordeaux where Durkheim taught 'social science' and philosophy at the Faculty of Letters. After having taken his degree of *agrégé de philosophie* he avoided embarking upon a regular teaching career which might have led him early to a faculty position. Instead he profited from grants to travel and work in Germany, Holland and Britain and pursued an initiation in Oriental studies (Sanskrit under Sylvain Lévy) and in Ethnology. Significantly enough, his first work, published at the age of 23 (in 1896), dealt with religion and the origins of penal law. His early specialisation in problems of primitive religion made him eligible at 28 to the chair of 'Religions of peoples without a civilization' at the 5th Section of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (1901). Hubert and Hertz, *Normaliens* and *agrégés*, also responded very early to the Durkheimian call. Thus Hubert became also at 28 the first lecturer on ancient European religions, alongside Mauss at the *Ecole Pratique*.

25. Mauss's attendance ranged from 16 to 38 and that of Hubert from 10 to 29 during the first ten years of their lecturing at

the *Ecole Pratique*.

26. Cf. his criticism of René Worms who made a case of the allegedly diminishing importance of ethnology for social studies. 'M. Durkheim thinks it is his duty to add that the usefulness of these studies [ethnology] does not seem to him to be doomed to decline in the future. So-called inferior societies have a special interest for sociology....' Cf. *Textes*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 258 ('Débat sur les rapports de l'ethnologie et de la sociologie').

27. Only two courses offered at the *Institut* were reserved for ethnology proper (Mauss lecturing on 'Descriptive ethnology' and Labouret on 'African ethnology'), as against four courses dedicated to physical anthropology, two to linguistics, one each to prehistorical geography, 'exotic prehistory', human geography and 'the linguistics and ethnography of Eastern Asia and Oceania'.

28. They argued sometimes for the maintenance of the separateness of empirical observation and of interpretation of the findings. 'There must be sociologists and ethnographers. The first ones explain, the other ones inform.' Cf. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 389 ('Le manuel d'anthropologie de Kroeber' [1925]).

29. Indeed his 'Instructions sommaires pour les collecteurs d'objets ethnographiques' soon became a much-used guide for field-workers. During Mauss's involvement with the *Institut d'ethnologie* (1925-1940), more than a hundred field trips were sponsored in Africa (50), Asia (15), the Americas (30), Oceania (6) and Europe (12).

30. The continued preservation of the theoretical ambitions of French ethnology, a clearly Durkheimian heritage, is of course largely due to the high standing of the academic recruitment of many of the best field scholars, a manifest survival of the model set by the Durkheimian cluster. Like some of the most prominent members of the *Année* group, Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu had taken the highest available degree in philosophy before embarking upon their research career.