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Gangism: An 'Elementary Form of Religious Life'

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Elementary Forms of Religious Life

“The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (1912)

By Emile Durkheim

Key aspects of Durkheim’s analysis:

- *Definition of Religion:* Durkheim defines religion as a system of beliefs and practices that are unified into a single moral community, creating a collective consciousness.
- *Social Origin of Religion:* He argues that religion originates from collective experiences and sentiments within society, rather than from individual or supernatural sources.
- *Collective Effervescence:* Durkheim emphasizes the importance of collective rituals in religious life, which generate a sense of collective effervescence or heightened emotional energy among participants.
- *Sacred and Profane:* He distinguishes between the sacred, which is set apart and regarded with reverence, and the profane, which is ordinary and mundane. Religious rituals and symbols mark this distinction.
- *Totemism:* Durkheim uses totemism as a case study to illustrate the social functions of religious beliefs and practices. Totemism involves the worship of symbols, often representing clans or kinship groups.
- *Religion as Social Integration:* He argues that religion serves to integrate individuals into social groups by providing them with a shared set of beliefs, values, and norms. It reinforces social cohesion and solidarity.
- *Moral Authority:* Durkheim suggests that religion serves as a source of moral authority, providing guidelines for behavior and promoting social order. Religious rituals reinforce moral codes and social norms.
- *Durability and Adaptability:* Despite changes in society, Durkheim argues that religion remains a durable and adaptable institution, evolving to meet the changing needs of society while still serving its integrative functions.



Photo Courtesy of Google Maps Street View, 2024

GANGBISM ~

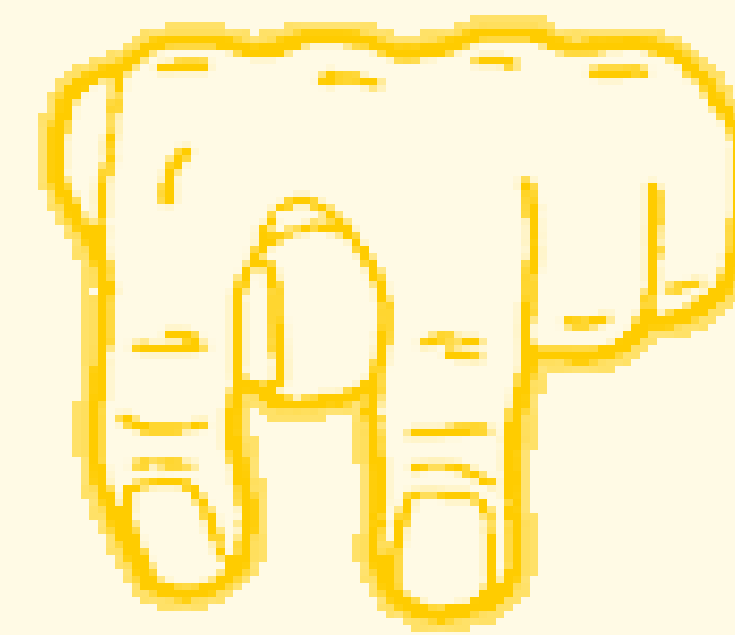


Photo Courtesy of the History Channel, 2009

Research Question:

~*Could gangs be an elementary form of religion?*

Methodology

~*Comparative Case Study Analysis*

Findings:

~*Both gangs and religious groups exhibit strong social cohesion and collective solidarity among members. Gangs, like religious communities, establish norms and values that guide the behavior of their members.*

~*Territory or turf, common in gangs, can be likened to sacred spaces in religious contexts, which symbolize group identity and cohesion, much in the way described by Durkheim’s reference to totemism.*

~*Gangs and religious groups both provide a sense of belonging and purpose to their members, Durkheim called this “collective effervescence”.*

~*Both gangs and religious groups engage in rituals and ceremonies that reinforce group identity and solidarity.*

~*External factors such as poverty and social disorganization influence the formation and behavior of gangs, similar to how societal conditions shape religious formation, beliefs, practices, and a collective conscience.*

AN ELEMENTARY FORM OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Hoover Crips

“When Cripin’ Becomes a Way of Life” (2008)

By Steven Cureton

Key aspects of Cureton’s analysis:

- “Hoovers appeal depends on its promise of an everlasting association with a special tradition that is obviously more important than the reality of prison confinement and/or death. Hoover offers a chance to establish an identity, a respectful reputation, hood immortality, and a legacy for future generations.”
- “Fundamentally, Hoover extends a strong arm of acceptance, understanding, and openness that is consistent with Black males’ needs. Logically, this could entice scores of Black males to join, much the same way that conventional people accept their respective Gods in order to be delivered from a weary social state.”
- “Hoovers appeal for resident young Black males may be similar to hearing a message of individual worthiness to be eternally saved by the Christian Messiah. Within a street context, the message is arguably the same.”
- “Older Gangsters assumed the responsibility of passing on knowledge of gangster history, traditional rites of passage, street etiquette, gangster protocol, and gangster politics”
- “The spiritual location of Hoover appears to be firmly rooted in death.”
- “Even in death, the gang offers its version of eternal life, redemption, and salvation because a gangster’s manly spirit will be respectfully remembered.”

